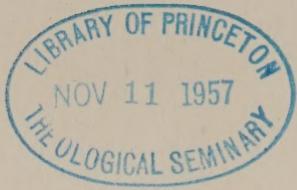


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I

THE RELIGIOUS FAITH OF JOHN FISKE



The Religious Faith of John Fiske

H. BURNELL PANNILL

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To
My Father and Mother
and
Mary Alleta

PREFACE

A PART of the task of the Christian philosopher in any age is the interpretation of the Christian message to his contemporaries. The danger inherent in this undertaking is obvious. There is always present the possibility that the content of the message may be colored and changed by the peculiarities of the restatement. The evaluation of the work of any thinker who has undertaken this task, therefore, must include consideration both of the man and of his age, both of what he believed and of the way in which he attempted to express his beliefs. It is this latter task which we propose, using as the subject of our consideration and evaluation the popular lecturer and writer in the fields of history and religious philosophy, John Fiske.

The age in which Fiske lived, the latter half of the nineteenth century, was an age in which philosophical, religious, and historical concepts were being modified by certain conclusions which the studies of biological evolution had suggested. Like many others of his generation, he saw these changes as evidences of a renaissance in thought. He once remarked that the age in which he lived would be known to future historians as "especially the era of the decomposition of orthodoxies." Although the insight of that prophecy was limited, it was a true expression of the spirit that dominated the man and his age. As a religious

philosopher he attempted a restatement of what he thought was the core of the Christian message in the categories which the new science of his day had developed. As an historian and philosopher of history he sought to exhibit and substantiate his conviction that every facet of human life and thought could be interpreted adequately and accurately within the evolutionary framework. For more than thirty years he labored to help fashion the popular thought, religious, historical, and philosophical, into new molds, to share something of the enthusiastic optimism with which these new insights had endowed him since his youth. When he died in 1901 the renaissance had reached its zenith.

Rebel though he was, his rebellion against the orthodoxies of his day is only a part of the whole story. Fiske was also a man of faith, and any evaluation of his contribution to American thought must take full cognizance of the nature and sources of that faith. Deeper than his concern with the scientific theories of his day was a liberal interest in the possibilities of man which was essentially religious in its origin. He accepted the new science so enthusiastically because it held so much promise for the establishment of those possibilities. In his earlier works—those written between 1860 and 1874—his attention was directed primarily to the defense of the evolutionary interpretation of cosmic phenomena. The works of this period culminated in the publication of *The Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* in 1874. This work was basic to the whole development of his thought, and its publication established him as one of the foremost American interpreters of Herbert Spencer. In his later works he began to explore the possibilities of developing the general principles of Cosmic Philosophy in relation to the history and development of man. He was no longer concerned to argue for the validity of the theory of evolution, except in an indirect manner. His major interest during this later period was to show that this theory could be used to substantiate the intuitive claims made by the human spirit. The areas of his interest were limited

largely to history and religion, and his own intuitive, idealistic convictions became more and more evident as he drew further away from the concern which was dominant prior to 1874.

We might well describe the work of Fiske as a "search for an adequate faith." But the faith was twofold. There was a basic intuitive faith in humanity and in the essentially religious aspirations of man; and there was a secondary faith in the method of interpretation of the phenomena of human experience which evolutionary science provided. For Fiske the former was primary; the significance of the latter was to be found in the defense and support which it offered to the first. By combining the two he thought he could erect a Cosmic Philosophy which would provide for the convictions of man and establish those convictions upon a firm foundation. Thus he sought to show that the evolutionary interpretation of history substantiated man's convictions of progress and the possibility of the Kingdom of God on earth. In a like manner he tried to establish, through an evolutionary interpretation of the states of consciousness of man, the basis for an adequate theism. His popular success is a witness to the skill with which he approached his chosen task. His failure to make a lasting impression upon American thought is to be attributed to his failure to heed the warning of the danger present in the task.

This present evaluation of Fiske's thought is offered primarily in the interest of supplying what is felt to be a needed chapter in the history of American religious thought. The study seems indicated because, although his influence upon subsequent thinkers has not been strong, he did make a contribution to his day which has not been sufficiently noted and appraised. The last full-scale attempt to present his contribution was John Spencer Clark's *The Life and Letters of John Fiske*, published in 1917. This work, while valuable as a source book on Fiske's life, offers little in the way of an objective treatment of his thought. The edition of his letters by Ethel F. Fisk (1940), and the privately printed edition of his personal letters, edited

by Henry Howard Harper (1924), add to our information about the details of his personal life. Brief evaluations of his contributions to American religious, historical, and philosophical thought are to be found in many of the standard collections, surveys, and texts. Beyond these brief notices, however, the attempt which Fiske made to reinterpret his religious faith and to make it meaningful for his contemporaries has gone unnoticed.

The material in this present volume grew out of research which was begun while the author was a candidate for the Ph.D. degree in Duke University, and many of the conclusions reached here were expressed first in the dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of that institution. The entire work, however, has been revised and rewritten, the bibliographical section has been brought up to date, and some additional material has been added.

I am indebted to a number of persons who have contributed in various ways to the preparation and publication of this study. Professor H. Shelton Smith of Duke University, at whose suggestion the study was originally undertaken, has given immeasurable aid in inspiration and guidance. I am grateful to Mr. Gurney Harriss Kearns and the Gurney Harriss Kearns Foundation of Duke University for the fellowship I was honored to hold as a graduate student and for the grant which has made possible this publication. I am also indebted to Randolph-Macon College and the Research Council of the Richmond Area University Center for the research award which aided materially in bringing the volume to its completion. I wish to thank Mrs. Flavia Reed Owen for the contribution of her ability in preparing the manuscript and Mr. Ashbel G. Brice and his staff of the Duke University Press for the help they have given me in preparing the manuscript for publication. For permission to quote and to reprint I am indebted to the following publishers: Houghton Mifflin Company (*The Writings of John Fiske*, Edition De Luxe; J. S. Clark, *The Life and Letters of John Fiske*; *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*; *The Journals of*

Ralph Waldo Emerson; G. Harris, *A Century's Change in Religion*); Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. (H. T. Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*); Beacon Press, Inc. (the *Works* of Theodore Parker, Centenary Edition); Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc. (V. L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*); Harper and Brothers (M. Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*); The Ronald Press Company (W. H. Werkmeister, *A History of Philosophical Ideas in America*). Permission to reprint excerpts from *The Letters of William James* (Little, Brown and Company, 1926), was granted by Paul R. Reynolds and Son, 599 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. In particular I wish to thank Mrs. Ethel Fiske Fisk for her permission to quote from her edition of *The Letters of John Fiske* (The Macmillan Company, 1940) and from Fiske, *Essays Historical and Literary* (The Macmillan Company, 1902).

Finally, to my wife, whose contributions to this work have been as extensive as my own, I owe my sincerest expression of gratitude. It is dedicated to her, and to my mother and father, with my appreciation for their sacrifices, interest, and encouragement.

Randolph-Macon College
February, 1957

H.B.P

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The Religious Faith
of John Fiske



CHAPTER ONE

THE MAKING OF A RELIGIOUS REBEL

1. THE REVOLT AGAINST ORTHODOXY

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century John Fiske emerged as one of the leaders among the American thinkers who were attempting to reinterpret religion in evolutionary terms. Few men were better prepared for that task than this self-styled disciple of Herbert Spencer. His own early religious experience was one of change from orthodox conviction to liberal skepticism. His mature reaffirmation of the validity of many religious beliefs was the outcome of a reasoned acceptance, reinforced by a wide acquaintance with the leading scientific writings of his day. That which he wrote for others to read was derived from his own experience as it had been molded in a crucible of intellectual and emotional conflict.

His life divides itself rather naturally into three periods. The first eighteen years (1842-1860) were the period of rebellion and conflict, the years in which "liberation of the spirit" was the keynote of his search for a more adequate faith to replace the religious orthodoxy which he found to be so unsatisfactory. In 1860 he began reading Spencer's interpretation of evolution; and this system of philosophy, coupled with the writings of Darwin and others, gave a distinctive evolutionary

coloring to the books and essays which he produced during the next fourteen years. This was the period of a new faith and of dedication to its defense and substantiation. The remainder of his life (1874-1901) was the productive period in which he emerged, not only as an interpreter of Spencer, but as a philosopher of religion and history in his own right. The writings of this later period bear the marks of his own struggle to achieve a faith which was both emotionally satisfying and intellectually defensible. The note of confidence which they sound reflects his own satisfaction in the answers which his search had given him.

Fiske was born on March 30, 1842, in Hartford, Connecticut, to Edmund Brewster Green and his wife, Mary Fisk Bound. He was christened Edmund Fisk Green, but after his father had died in 1852 and his mother had remarried, his name was changed to John Fiske in honor of his maternal great-grandfather.¹ He was reared in the home of his maternal grandparents in Middletown, Connecticut, where he was exposed both to the strict tenets and discipline of New England Puritanism and to the liberalizing influence of a large and varied library. His early interest in reading and studying was noticed and encouraged, and by the time he had reached his fourth birthday he had learned to read well and was enrolled in a private primary school.² In November of 1850 he entered a preparatory school in Middletown, and during the next ten years he attended several private schools and did some individual study, at times

¹ The changing of the boy's name took place in April, 1855, after his mother had married Edwin Wallace Stoughton and had moved to New York City. The change was made official in September of that year by the Superior Court of Connecticut. A subsequent misprinting of the name as "Fiske" in the Harvard catalogue of 1860 led him to adopt that spelling, which had been used by some of his maternal ancestors. Fiske continued to make his home in Middletown until he left for Cambridge, Mass., in 1860, preparatory to enrolling in Harvard College. See J. S. Clark, *The Life and Letters of John Fiske* (De Luxe Edition; Boston and New York, 1917), I, 1-56, *passim*.

² *Ibid.*, I, 26 ff. Writing to his grandmother Green on May 19, 1850, he reported: "I am now 8 years old and have read about 200 vols of books on all subjects, particularly on Nat. History, Philosophy, Chemistry, Astronomy, Grammar, Mathematics, and miscellaneous things. I have also read Spanish a little" (*The Letters of John Fiske*, ed. Ethel F. Fiske, New York, 1940, p. 1. This collection is cited hereinafter as *Letters*).

with the assistance of a tutor.³ During these years he began to give evidence of the almost exhaustive character of his interests. Few things failed to claim his attention, and he seemed to have an overwhelming intention of mastering everything. So universal was his reading during this early period that it is difficult to find clues to his later specific interests. From the first, however, there was attention to history, geography, and philology. His biographer, John Spencer Clark, suggests that as early as 1856 "he appears to have been dwelling upon the thought that the tracing-out of God's Providence in history would be a suitable work for his mature years."⁴ Although he did not live to complete this work, the intention remained with him and most of his major writings during his later years reflect this early interest.

During John's early years in Middletown, the pastorate of the North Congregational Church, which he attended, was held by a Dr. Crane, a minister of the strict orthodox school. Under this ministry the mind of the boy absorbed much of Calvinism, even though he did not understand all the implications of the creed that was preached. While the evidence is scarce, he apparently accepted the somewhat anthropomorphic theology that was preached in the religious exercises which he attended. In one of his later works he gave us his own picture of his early conception of God:

I remember distinctly the conception which I had formed when five years of age. I imagined a narrow office just over the zenith, with a tall standing-desk running lengthwise, upon which lay several open ledgers bound in coarse leather. There was no roof over this office, and the walls rose scarcely five feet from the floor, so that a person standing at the desk could look out upon the whole world. There were two persons at

³ The chronology of this period is as follows. (See Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 37-128, *passim.*)

November, 1850—April, 1853—Chase Preparatory School.

October, 1853—April, 1854—Brewer's Preparatory School.

April, 1854—May, 1855—private study.

May, 1855—April, 1857—Betts Academy, Stamford, Conn.

May, 1857—August, 1859—study under the Reverend Henry M. Colton in Middletown as preparation for Yale; he decides to enter Harvard instead.

August, 1859—May, 1860—private study.

⁴ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 67.

the desk, and one of them—a tall, slender man, of aquiline features, wearing spectacles, with a pen in his hand and another behind his ear—was God. The other, whose appearance I do not distinctly recall, was an attendant angel. Both were diligently watching the deeds of men and recording them in the ledgers. To my infant mind this picture was not grotesque, but ineffably solemn, and the fact that all my words and acts were thus written down, to confront me at the day of judgment, seemed naturally a matter of grave concern.⁵

It was against this “grossly anthropomorphic conception of Deity” that Fiske was to react so decisively in later years; but it was unquestionably a part of his early religious thought. This early orthodox training remained with him throughout his youth, and during the two years at Betts Academy (1855-1857) there was a deepening of his religious sensitivity. The Academy, while nonsectarian, was strictly evangelical in character. Attendance at prayers and church services was obligatory, and John went beyond the requirements in his attendance and soon began to take an active part in the services. In June, 1856, he wrote to his mother, “I am teaching at Sunday School, and am interested in the Bible Class. Come with Grandma Lewis Thursday if possible as there are revival meetings on Wednesday and Friday evenings at which I lead the singing and take part in the speaking.”⁶ When he returned to Middletown to study under the Reverend Henry Colton, he took an active role in the North Church. He had become interested in music and began devoting considerable time to it. Having a certain amount of natural talent for playing and singing, he became fairly proficient and even tried his hand at composing. His work in the choir of North Church provided an admirable outlet for these interests.⁷

⁵ Fiske, *The Idea of God as Affected by Modern Knowledge*, *The Writings of John Fiske*, with an introduction by Josiah Royce (Cambridge, Mass., 1902), XXI, 172-173. This collection of Fiske's writings is cited hereinafter as *Writings*.

⁶ *Letters*, p. 11. It was about this time that he formally joined the North Congregational Church. His letters to his mother during this year and the next contain a considerable amount of concern over living each day “in the service of the meek and lowly Jesus,” and some philosophizing about the future, both earthly and heavenly (Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 66, 67-69).

⁷ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 79-80. Cf. the letter to his mother, dated April 3, 1858, in which he spoke of his work on “another opera,” the design and music of which

Late in the year 1858 Fiske obtained a copy of Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos*, a work which was to mark a turning point in his thinking. In it he found the suggestion of a new direction that his searching mind might explore. The first hint of his new "cosmic" interest comes in the following letter to his mother, dated October 8, 1858.

Mr. Nemo has some queer notions: he thinks the earth was made in a week. . . . And he ridicules the idea of men's seeing mountains on the moon, and so on. He thinks the sun possesses no heat, any more than the earth; consequently, he says, at Mercury no greater heat would be felt than on the earth: because—he says—when you rise two miles you are two miles nearer the sun and yet are cold! Does he not see that the most scorching heat will be of no avail in an attenuated atmosphere? Don't you believe in Arago's theory of the sun?

Do you not consider Humboldt the greatest man of the 19th century, and the most erudite that ever lived? Does not the "Cosmos" exhibit more vast learning than any other uninspired book?⁸

In December of 1858 he met Joseph Whitcomb Ellis, a graduate of Wesleyan University and a teacher in mathematics in the Middletown High School. Ellis, a liberal-minded Swedenborgian, had a splendid library in mathematics and science. John's interest in the books was rewarded with an invitation to use the library, an offer to which he responded with his customary appetite for new knowledge.⁹ By the middle of the next year he was ready to enter Yale and had received his "certificate of

he thinks will be better than the "first." In this same letter he expressed his desire to arrange a proposed visit to New York in such a way that he would be able to return to Middletown prior to May 5; his reason for this was that he wanted to be "back for the church meetings; there is 'something of a revival' here." (*Letters*, pp. 18-19).

⁸ *Letters*, p. 21. Almost two years later, writing to George Fitch Roberts, he answered his own questions:

July 1, 1860: "I have had my portrait of Humboldt put in a good frame and it now hangs over the mantelpiece. I have turned my table halfway round to face the mantelpiece."

July 8, 1860: "Ye Gods: what a book is 'Kosmos.' It is the Epic of the Universe. It would pay to learn German if that were the only book in the language. I should like to have W. von Humboldt's 'Gesammelte Werke'—they are glorious" (*ibid.*, pp. 42-43).

⁹ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 111; *Letters*, pp. 22-23. In this same letter he gives evidence of an increasing interest in the mathematics and metaphysics of Leibniz.

admission signed by President Porter."¹⁰ A sudden change occurred, however, and he decided, evidently against the wishes of his mother, to prepare for Harvard instead.

It is true that the instruction at Harvard is conducted with less strictness than at Yale. Harvard is a bad place for a careless student, but unequalled in facilities for an ambitious one. As for teaching, I don't expect to get much anywhere except what the books give me. As I don't need any strictness to make me study I do not see the force of those two arguments against my going to Harvard.¹¹

There was something more, however, than concern over methods of instruction which lay behind the decision to change schools. Harvard was known to have a more liberal intellectual atmosphere than Yale, and Fiske was beginning to question the orthodox position for which Yale stood.¹² His intensive reading of such authors as Humboldt, Buckle, and Comte during these years (1858-1859) could not fail to stimulate his already active mind. In May, 1859, George Roberts brought him the first volume of Buckle's *History of Civilization*. This book, with Humboldt's work, probably did more than any others to start Fiske on the search for the philosophy which, on the one hand, would liberate him from the restrictions of orthodoxy, and, on the other, would provide a new basis for his convictions about the nature of history and the essence of religion.¹³ It is evident that he had sensed that the answer to his search was not to be found in a superficial acceptance of new dogmas in the place of old ones. The troubled questioning which went on in his mind went deeper—to the nature of that which lay behind every dogmatic attempt at expression.

¹⁰ *Letters*, p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

¹² Cf. his letter of July 16, 1859, to his mother: "I am beginning to think that the human race originated in nations, instead of a single pair. In Agassiz's great work on the 'Natural History of North America,' he places the 'one-pair theory' among old and forgotten chimeras. Joseph Ellis says that the 'one-pair theory' was exploded years ago and should be considered as on a level with the 'orthodox' theory of creation" (*Ibid.*, p. 26).

¹³ Fiske's first published work was a review of Buckle's book in the *National Quarterly Review*, December, 1861.

Is this Christian religion as set forth in these dogmas the ultimate measure of the Infinite Creator of the physical universe, of the human soul? Can it be true that this religion is a veritable form of worship and conduct instituted by the Divine Creator of all things for man's special behoof and salvation; is the human race under such fearful doom; and do such portentous consequences to the eternal future of all mankind depend upon individual acceptance of the conditions of salvation as set forth in these dogmas?¹⁴

New expressions of faith would eventually be needed; but the forming of such would have to await the time when skepticism had emancipated the mind from the old formulations and a new avenue of insight could be found. In later years, in a conversation with John Spencer Clark, Fiske spoke of the decision which marked his seventeenth year as the turning point in his quest:

I can never forget the feeling of revulsion I experienced when I first brought these dogmas [of orthodoxy] together in my mind as an inter-related whole. I had received them from time to time as elements in the religious faith which I had accepted as Divine, without any question whatever. When, however, in my seventeenth year, I sought to bring my religious views under a rational interpretation, I found it was required that these dogmas should first be posited as the embodiment of all ultimate truth.¹⁵

When he attempted to systematize these dogmas into some scheme of cosmic creation, the result was "a mass of metaphysical assumptions, wherein science was disowned, where reason was discredited, and where blind, unquestioning faith was regarded as the only passport to true Christian knowledge." Consequently, he turned from the "benumbing influences" of such a scheme to the scientific approach which, he believed, gave a more verifiable knowledge of the cosmos, greater meaning to human life, and a "far higher conception of the Infinite Power back of the cosmos."¹⁶ There was no question in Fiske's mind in later years concerning the validity of his decision, although he did suggest

¹⁴ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 102.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 103 n. 1.

¹⁶ *Idem.*

that in the rashness of immaturity he had been so "repulsed" by the unverifiable assumptions of orthodoxy that he had failed to sense the real significance of dogma.

With more mature thought, I came to see the great spiritual truth enshrouded in these dogmas; and a wider acquaintance with the philosophy of history, led me to see that the dogmatic coverings of this great truth had been of immense service in its protection and its development while knowledge was slowly being organized through science, for its verification in human experience. And now the Christian world is beginning to see that religious and social progress consists mainly in the freeing of this great spiritual truth from the dogmatic wrappings it has outgrown.¹⁷

Although Fiske felt a real sense of liberation in his new philosophical position, the break with orthodox Christianity was not made without some distress of mind. His letters in the early part of 1860 reveal that the thing which gave him most pain was the inability of his mother and grandmother to understand his position. Coupled with this was the ostracism attendant upon his being labeled an "infidel" by the church in Middletown. The minister of North Church at the time was the Reverend Jeremiah Taylor, who unfortunately had little or no understanding or appreciation of the new ideas which Fiske found so significant. About the beginning of the year John stopped attending the North Church, in marked contrast to his earlier active participation. His grandmother was disturbed by the change and she asked the minister to investigate her grandson's "backsliding." The meeting of the two only served to widen the breach and resulted in Taylor's charge that young Fiske was "an atheist, an infidel, a blasphemer, a hypocrite, an immoral person, and finally . . . a Unitarian."¹⁸

When Fiske left Middletown for Cambridge in May, 1860, he was convinced that the answer he sought was to be found through a scientific examination of the phenomena of the universe. It was here, written in a language that only science could interpret,

¹⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 120-121.

that the true revelation of the Divine Creator was to be found.¹⁹ He had found a new faith—a “faith in the constancy of nature, and in the adequacy of ordinary human experience as interpreted by science.”²⁰ This new-found faith in the validity of the scientific approach was the doorway to the liberation of his mind. While he was still to speak of himself as a “skeptic,” actually he had replaced what he felt to be an outworn and inaccurate method of interpreting reality with one which, according to the emerging thought of the day, was both accurate and adequate. To others, more orthodox in their beliefs, the change might have seemed atheistical; but Fiske himself felt that it was a necessary step if his deepest convictions were to be saved.

II. IN DEFENSE OF A NEW FAITH

Fiske left Middletown for Cambridge with the intention of studying for a few months under a private tutor prior to entering Harvard as a sophomore or, if possible, as a junior. With the assistance of Judge Benjamin R. Curtis he succeeded in engaging the services of a tutor, “a resident graduate, named Bates, who smells of Greek dictionaries a rod off.”²¹ He began these preparatory studies on May 28, 1860, and on August 30 of the same year passed the sophomore entrance examinations.²² Three years later, on July 15, 1863, he was graduated, ranking forty-seventh in his class.²³ Fiske’s letters during these three

¹⁹ From a letter to the Reverend Jonathan Ebenezer Barnes, D.D. (*ibid.*, I, 122 ff.).

²⁰ Fiske, *Myths and Myth-Makers, Old Tales and Superstitions Interpreted by Comparative Mythology, Writings*, XVII, 53.

²¹ *Letters*, p. 37.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 45 ff.

²³ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 260. Actually, his marks were far better than his rank suggested, but he received a number of “deductions from honors” through excessive absences, demerits, etc. He explained this fact to his mother several years later when he had an opportunity to see his record in the Dean’s office:

“I found I stood 47th among 112 and my name ought to have been printed: eleven names were printed which stood lower than mine. The amount of my deductions . . . was above 5000. Omitting these from the amount, and calculating my rank on the marks *on my examinations* alone, I should have stood first for senior year, and fourth or fifth for the whole course. My average percentage for senior year was almost unprecedently high. But the measles spoiled it: I lost six weeks and never cared enough about it to make them up.”

One of the major causes of these deductions was Fiske’s practice of cutting

years reveal that while he was conscientious in his class preparation, he did not limit himself to the curriculum offered by Harvard. His preparatory reading had already interested him in ideas which were too new to have found their places in the prescribed course of study. He developed strong friendships with a number of professors on the faculty, among them being Professors Wyman and Asa Gray, both advocates of the Darwinian theory of evolution. It is significant that he does not appear to have established any such relations with Louis Agassiz, whose theory of special creations in the organic world was the leading anti-Darwinian proposal among the American scientists.²⁴

Fiske was not long in making his views on evolution known. His large and carefully selected library spoke for itself and he never hesitated in defending his position against the students of Agassiz. By the opening of his junior year he had the reputation of being "a well-equipped Darwinian, and of holding philosophic views of a Positivistic character."²⁵ When he began to disseminate his opinions, the Parietal Committee, whose office it was to enforce the "Orders and Regulations" of the college, began to keep close watch on his religious activity. In October, 1861, he was observed reading in church from a volume of Comte, and was promptly called before President Felton for examination. The latter began to question him about his religious beliefs, and "Fiske frankly stated his disbelief in many of the dogmas of Christian theology, and was equally frank in expressing adherence to what was then termed, for want of a better name, the Positive Philosophy."²⁶ An attempt was made before the faculty to link Fiske's "disrespect for the Christian faith" with his philosophic views and have him suspended for a year. The effort failed, however, and he apologized for violating the regulation of the college. His only punishment was a "Public Admonition" for

prayers and church services. It is probable that this alone prevented his winning a scholarship during his first year (*Letters*, p. 74).

²⁴ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 196-197.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 206.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 232.

the offense of reading in church, but in President Felton's report to Fiske's mother (October 16, 1861) the charge of "undermining the faith" of his fellow-students was again brought out.

Your son's good character in general, and his faithful attendance to his studies, induced the faculty to limit the censure to a Public Admonition. I have only to add, that while we claim no right to interfere with the private opinion of any student, we should feel it our duty to request the removal of any one who should undertake to undermine the faith of his associates. I hope you will caution your son upon this point; for any attempt to spread the mischievous opinions which he fancies he has established in his own mind, would lead to an instant communication to his guardian to take him away.²⁷

The letter leaves no doubt that, whatever the official verdict of the faculty, unofficially Fiske was on probation for a too-zealous defense of his faith among the Harvard undergraduates. President Felton's fears about Fiske's opinions were well-founded. On October 14 Fiske had completed his review article on Henry Thomas Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*; the article was published in the December issue of the *National Quarterly Review*. While Fiske later denied that he had ever been, "in any legitimate sense of the word, a positivist," the article does show a heavy reliance upon Comte's "three stages of mental evolution." Even this early, however, it is Herbert Spencer who appears as the brightest star in the galaxy of scientists and philosophers who were freeing the intellectual world of the chains of dogma.

Fiske's intellectual interests at Harvard were so intense and complete that he seemed to show little concern at first over the civil war which had split the nation. Indeed, when his friend, George Roberts, accused him of indifference to the condition of the country, he replied: "What fools people make of themselves about this confounded war! Why, I forget there is a war half the time. What's a war when a fellow has 'Kosmos' on his shelf, and 'Faust' on his table?"²⁸ His later letters, however, reveal that

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 234.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 237.

this retort did not present the whole picture. True to his nature, he was reading everything he could find on the principles involved in the struggle.²⁹ Two days after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Fiske wrote the following to his fianceé, Abby Morgan Brooks:

What a splendid thing the President's Proclamation is! I am really enthusiastic about the war now. I feel as if we were fighting henceforth with an end in view. I hope that the fiendish institution of slavery, which has hitherto made me ashamed of America, is at last to fall. I always was a red-hot anti-slavery man in principle, but never cared much for the success of a war that was to leave us on this question just where we were before. I always felt that union was impossible without abolition. . . . I am studying the war hard, *strategy* and everything. I take the "New York Daily Times" and read it half an hour every evening after supper; and I have got some large war-maps of the various fields of military operations which I have hung on the walls in my room, and with pins of different colored heads I follow the movements of the contending forces.³⁰

Near the end of his first year at Harvard Fiske had met Miss Brooks of Petersham, Massachusetts. They became engaged to be married in March of 1862, but the marriage itself was postponed until September of 1864, after John had finished his work at Harvard.³¹ Almost immediately following their first meeting he began to plan for their life together. After the engagement was announced, his thoughts turned more and more to the very practical problem of earning a livelihood. His first choice, and the one to which he eventually returned with so much success, was a literary career. In the latter part of 1862 he wrote to Abby Brooks:

I am going to work now, and the thought of you will inspire me to new exertion. I am going to study more thoroughly than ever the Hebrew language, history and mythology, and trace the confluence of ancient philosophies and theologies into the great stream of thought which issued in Christianity; then the rise, culmination and decline of dogmatic

²⁹ See *Letters*, pp. 93-95.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

³¹ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 299.

Christianity, till its forms fell away and the deep religion which lay beneath them was taken up by the Positive Philosophers and grew into the world religion announced by Herbert Spencer, the greatest of the sons of men! Won't it be glorious when I can pursue these studies with you by my side, and some day write a history of the religious development of mankind.³²

With this in mind Fiske began looking for a teaching post, but none was forthcoming for an inexperienced graduate. He had long hoped to be appointed as a tutor at Harvard, but the school which had almost suspended him for his heretical views was not yet ready to add him to its instructional staff. The other choice of a profession, the one which his mother preferred, was law. When the last teaching post for which he had applied (in a high school in Charlestown, Massachusetts) was finally given to another candidate, he gave up his first love and entered the Harvard Law School in October, 1863.³³ Nine months later he had finished enough of the course to stand the examination and in July, 1864, he was admitted to the Boston Bar.³⁴ He continued his connection with the school as a student after his marriage until he had completed the prescribed residence to qualify for the LL.B. degree. He was neither successful nor happy in the legal profession. His few clients did not provide him with sufficient income to meet the demands of his growing family, and early in 1866 he made his decision to give up law and concentrate upon a literary career.³⁵

Throughout this period (1863-1866), his letters reveal that he had never actually given up his interest in the scientific and philosophic discussions of the day. He was constantly on the search for new books in these fields, had developed a lasting friendship with E. L. Youmans, corresponded with Spencer, and written several articles himself.³⁶ Once his mind was free to

³² *Ibid.*, I, 256-257.

³³ *Ibid.*, I, 261 ff.

³⁴ *Letters*, pp. 130-131.

³⁵ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 305.

³⁶ In addition to the article on Buckle which drew the attention of Youmans, Spencer, and Lewes to Fiske, the following essays were written during this period: "Evolution of Language" (*North American Review*, Oct., 1863), "Problems in Language and Mythology" (*Christian Examiner*, May, 1865), "The Conflict of

pursue the interests which had always been of foremost concern to him, Fiske began working on two essays in the area of the relation of evolution to the philosophy of history.³⁷ The first of these essays on the "Laws of History" was sent to the liberal *Fortnightly Review* in England and was promptly accepted.³⁸ It attracted immediate attention from no less a personage than the historian George Grote. In a letter to Alexander Bain, dated September 4, 1868, Grote spoke highly of Fiske's work:

The same number [*Fortnightly Review* for September, 1868] contained also an admirable article upon the "Science of History," written with great ability and in the best spirit by an American whose name I have never heard before—John Fiske. I am truly glad to find that there are authors capable, as well as willing, to enunciate such thoughts.³⁹

During these years events were taking place at Harvard which were destined to change the educational theories at the university and, indirectly, affect the work of Fiske. In 1865, the alumni of the university succeeded in securing the right for the Masters of Arts to elect the members of the Board of Overseers, a right which had been vested in the State Legislature since 1851.⁴⁰ On the day that the new method was put into effect (July 19, 1866), the alumni celebrated by holding one of their triennial festivals. The speaker of the day was a Unitarian minister, the Reverend Frederick H. Hedge, who took the opportunity to offer some suggestions concerning needed reforms. Fiske was present and expressed his approval of the speech. Shortly thereafter, he met with Professor Gurney and John Spencer Clark, who per-

Reason with Bigotry and Superstition" (*Christian Examiner*, Sept. 1866), and two review notices, Mill's "Political Economy" (*North American Review* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, 1864), and Youman's "Chemistry" (*Atlantic Monthly*, 1864).

³⁷ The selection of this subject as the thesis for his first essay in this new period is significant in terms of his interest in history throughout his life. In 1891, speaking of the contributions of Spencer, he remarked: "If I may cite from my own experience, it was largely the absorbing and overmastering passion for the study of history that first led me to study evolution in order to obtain a correct method" ("The Doctrine of Evolution," *Writings*, XXII, 40).

³⁸ The second of the two articles was published in a revised form in the *North American Review*, CIX (July, 1869), 197-230. See *Letters*, p. 176.

³⁹ *Life and Letters of George Grote*, quoted by Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 312.

⁴⁰ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 320-321; *Letters*, pp. 151-152.

suaded him to contribute an article on "University Reform." Both articles were published in the *Atlantic Monthly*.⁴¹ Hedge's address had centered on the theme that "an indispensable condition of intellectual growth is liberty."⁴² Such liberty, he said, the present system at Harvard denied.

Must we not . . . describe it as a place where boys are made to recite from textbooks, and to write compulsory exercises, and are marked according to their proficiency and fidelity in these performances, with a view to a somewhat protracted exhibition of themselves at the close of their college course? . . . the principle is coercion. Hold your subject fast with one hand, and pour knowledge into him with the other. The professors are taskmasters and police-officers, the President the Chief of the College police.⁴³

Fiske's article took up this call for liberty in education and expanded it. The duty of a university he summed up in two propositions: ". . . to teach the student how to think for himself, and then to give him the material to exercise his thought upon."⁴⁴ While it was desirable that the student's opinions be correct, it was far more desirable that his opinions be "arrived at independently and maintained with intelligence and candor." "Skeptical activity," he wrote, "is better than dogmatic torpor; and our motto should be, Think the truth as far as possible, but above all things, think. When a university throws its influence into the scale in favor of any party, religious or political, philosophic or aesthetic, it is neglecting its consecrated duty, and abdicating its high position."⁴⁵

In September, 1868, the Reverend Thomas Hill resigned as the President of Harvard, and considerable speculation as to the professional character of his successor developed. There was a strong feeling among some on the Board of Overseers that the

⁴¹ *Letters*, p. 152. Dr. Hedge's article appeared in September, 1866; Fiske's in April, 1867.

⁴² "University Reform," *Atlantic Monthly*, XVIII (Sept., 1866), 302.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 301.

⁴⁴ Fiske, "Considerations on University Reform," *Atlantic Monthly*, XIX (April, 1867), 452.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, XIX, 453.

tradition of selecting a clergyman needed to be broken. Fiske was asked by James Russell Lowell and E. L. Godkin, editor of the *Nation*, to write an article on the situation.⁴⁶ The article was published as an editorial in the December 31 issue of the *Nation* under the title "The Presidency of Harvard." In the article Fiske suggested that all clergymen be bypassed in the consideration of candidates; a good clergyman, he thought, was not likely to be a good president.⁴⁷ He then set down those qualities which he felt to be requisite to the office.

To sum up, then: What we do not want is a mere business man, a fossil man, an ultra-radical man, or a clergyman. What we do want is a man of thorough scholarship—not a specialist, not a mere mathematician or physicist or grammarian, but a man of general culture, able to estimate at their proper importance the requirements of culture, and at the same time endowed with sound judgment, shrewd mother-wit, practical good sense.⁴⁸

Although Fiske was actually writing to support the cause of his friend, Professor Gurney, the response to the article was so heartening that he wrote that it might be instrumental in "paving the way for a reformer even greater than Gurney."⁴⁹ This reformer was to be Charles W. Eliot, chosen President by the Corporation in March, 1869, and confirmed by the Board of Overseers in May.⁵⁰ The anticipated reform was not long in coming. Eliot immediately began to arrange for seven lecture courses in philosophy to be given during the academic year 1869-1870. Two of these were to represent recent philosophic thought. Ralph Waldo Emerson was asked to give one on "The Natural History of the Intellect," and Fiske the other, on "The Positive Philosophy." Fiske accepted with alacrity, certain that the "days of old fogyism" at Harvard were numbered and that the way was now open to him to gain the professorship he had long

⁴⁶ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 342.

⁴⁷ "The Presidency of Harvard," *Nation*, VII (Dec. 31, 1868), 548; cf. *Letters*, pp. 180-181.

⁴⁸ *Nation*, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Letters*, p. 181.

⁵⁰ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 345.

hoped for.⁵¹ While he was delighted with his new position, he did not like the name given to the lectures. Too many persons associated Comte's thought with the "Positive Philosophy" and Fiske, as well as Spencer, wanted a new name. Much of his lecturing during the first year, therefore, was taken up in contrasting the completeness of the philosophy based upon evolution as interpreted by Spencer and what Fiske considered to be the serious shortcomings of Comte's philosophy.⁵²

Eliot reappointed Fiske as "Lecturer on the Positive Philosophy" for the next year, 1870-1871, and the response which the first series had received led Fiske to consider the presentation of a more detailed exposition of what he thought a true Evolutionary Philosophy should be.⁵³ This second series, like the first, was published in the *New York World*, and he began to consider the possibility of publishing the whole as a work on "Cosmic Philosophy."⁵⁴ He sent the lectures to Spencer in September of 1871 and asked him for criticisms and comments. Spencer's reply was highly complimentary, but it disappointed Fiske in that there was little real response to the questions which he had asked. He then began to make plans for a trip to England where he could converse with both Spencer and Darwin about the proposed work.⁵⁵

Following the second series of lectures at Harvard, Fiske delivered the complete set in Boston, where they were so well received that he was asked to repeat two of them. His popularity was steadily increasing, and he was rapidly becoming a nationally recognized popular authority on evolution. He was invited to deliver a full series of lectures on the subject in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and accepted for the following September (1872).⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, 347; *Letters*, pp. 185-186.

⁵² Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 359.

⁵³ Through the influence of E. L. Youmans, the lectures were published in the *New York World*. This gave them a much wider reading and hearing than would have been possible otherwise.

⁵⁴ Between the time of the two lecture series (that is, from January, 1870, to February, 1871), Fiske was asked to fill the chair of history at Harvard. He served the spring term, but opposition to his reappointment was so strong among the Overseers that Eliot did not ask him to continue (Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 373 ff.).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 383.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 397.

In May, 1872, Eliot appointed Fiske Assistant Librarian at Harvard, his duties to begin the following October.⁵⁷ He spent most of the intervening summer collecting his papers on mythology, most of which had been published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, preparatory to publishing them as his first book, *Myths and Myth-Makers*. During the winter of 1873 he repeated his lectures in Boston. One of his hearers, a Mrs. M. A. Edwards of Boston, was so impressed that, upon hearing that the publication of the lectures as a book was being delayed until Fiske could make the trip abroad to consult Spencer and others, she presented him with a check for one thousand dollars to be used for the trip. He secured a leave of absence from his post at Harvard and in August set sail.⁵⁸ Just before he left he finished two articles: one on Darwinism, called "From Brute to Man," for the *North American Review*, and the other on Louis Agassiz for the *Popular Science Monthly*.⁵⁹

The first article is significant in that here Fiske set forth in print for the first time his famous argument for social and moral evolution based on the "prolongation of infancy" in man.⁶⁰ It was this argument which he claimed to be his original contribution to the theory of evolution. It was in the second article, however, that he appeared at his height in the defense of his new faith. The article was called forth, he said, by an announcement in the *Nation* to the following effect: "The Darwinian Theory utterly demolished . . . by AGASSIZ HIMSELF."⁶¹ Fiske rebelled at the implication that a "sort of scientific pope"

⁵⁷ *Letters*, pp. 213-214.

⁵⁸ *Letters*, p. 224. He remained in England and France until the late spring of the following year.

⁵⁹ The latter article was unfortunately timed. It appeared in October, 1873, and Agassiz died on December 14. His popularity was such that his death was felt to be almost a national loss. Consequently, Fiske's article, which was extremely critical, while well-received in England, was rather severely criticized at home. See Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 410-411.

⁶⁰ "The Progress from Brute to Man," *North American Review*, CXVII (Oct., 1873), 299 ff. This argument is reproduced in *Cosmic Philosophy*, part II, chaps. XXI-XXII, *Writings*, XVI, 46-162.

⁶¹ Fiske, "Agassiz and Darwinism," *Popular Science Monthly*, III (Oct., 1873), 692-693.

had arisen in America to demolish single-handed "the stoutest edifice which observation and deduction have reared since the day when Newton built to such good purpose."⁶² He then proceeded to examine the traditional arguments of Agassiz and found that, in the final analysis, his most crushing arguments against Darwinism were really the "simple expression of his personal dislike for 'mechanical agencies,' and his belief in the 'free manifestations of an intelligent Mind.'"⁶³ However unfair and untimely the article was, it did reveal Fiske as a leading American figure in the growing army of evolutionists. Agassiz's approaching death was marking the end of the era of opposition. It was, in a sense, appropriate that the final work of Fiske before his sailing to England and prior to Agassiz's death should be an impassioned defense of the new faith, directed against the scientist who had led the opposition for a decade and a half. When Fiske returned to America, the new day for evolution had dawned. He was no longer called upon to defend what he had so long believed; rather he returned as the acknowledged American interpreter of the new philosophy, a disciple of Herbert Spencer who was already exploring the realm of metaphysics which the master had declined to enter.

III. AMERICA'S COSMIC PHILOSOPHER

Fiske's trip to England proved to be a most profitable experience. During his stay he was able to confer, sometimes at great length, with Spencer, Darwin, T. H. Huxley, Lewes, Tyndall, and others of the new school of scientific thought. As a result of these interviews and discussions, Fiske revised the metaphysical and scientific sections of his lectures, rewrote to a great extent the sociological chapters, and added several new

⁶² *Ibid.*, III, 693.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, III, 705. Fiske was especially critical of Agassiz's assertion that he preferred "theological over scientific considerations." Fiske's observation was that "a scientific inquirer has no business to have 'preferences.' Such things are fit only for silly women of society, or for young children who play with facts, instead of making sober use of them. What matters it whether we are pleased with the notion of a monkey-ancestry or not? The end of scientific research is the discovery of truth, and not the satisfaction of our whims or fancies, or even what we are pleased to call our finer feelings" (*ibid.*, III, 697).

chapters: "Matter and Spirit," "Religion as Adjustment" and the "Critical Attitude of Philosophy."⁶⁴ There was some discussion and disagreement between Fiske and Spencer over the proposed title for the book. Fiske, with the assistance of Huxley, finally decided upon *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy based on the Doctrine of Evolution, with Criticisms of the Positive Philosophy*.⁶⁵ Spencer preferred his own title, *Synthetic Philosophy*, arguing that "all philosophies whatever may, in a certain sense, be termed 'Cosmic,' inasmuch as all philosophies have had for their subject matter the explanation of the universe or cosmos."⁶⁶ Fiske admitted the weight of the argument, but found the same weakness to apply to "Synthetic"; in addition, he felt that "Cosmic" conveyed all the implications of "Synthetic" while also emphasizing the very point at which Spencer's philosophy was "fundamentally distinguished alike from Positivism and from all ontological systems."

For the term "Cosmos" *connotes* the orderly succession of phenomena quite as forcibly as it *denotes* the totality of phenomena; and with anything absolute or ontological, with anything save the "Mundus" or orderly world of phenomena, it has nothing whatever to do. So that, strictly speaking, no theological system of philosophy can be called "Cosmic" while admitting miracle, special creation, or any other denial of the persistence of force, into its scheme of things; and no ontological system can be called "Cosmic" while professing to deal with existence not included within the phenomenal world.⁶⁷

As eager as Fiske was to establish the relation between his thought and that of Spencer, the fact remains that there was a difference in the approach which each made to the "Philosophy of Evolution." In the first place, the concern over the implications about the Deity, which such a study would provide, were of completely secondary interest to Spencer.⁶⁸ Fiske, on the

⁶⁴ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 462.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 464.

⁶⁶ Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, x.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, xi-xii.

⁶⁸ In a letter to Fiske, dated Feb. 2, 1870, Spencer wrote that such matters "have been all along quite secondary to the grand doctrine of Evolution, considered as an interpretation of the Cosmos from a purely scientific or physical point of

other hand, was definitely concerned to make some "positive statement" about the "religious side of philosophy" as well as its "scientific side."⁶⁹ In the second place, we have already seen that Fiske's interest in evolution really predated his acquaintance with Spencer's works. There was an early interest in human life and human history that contrasts with Darwin's interests as a naturalist and Spencer's interests as a social reformer and a comparative student of the natural sciences. Josiah Royce, in his introduction to the 1902 edition of *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*, suggests that Fiske's early interest would have led him to explore the problems of the unity of the process of man's historical existence even if he had never heard of Darwin and Spencer.⁷⁰ It was this interest which led Fiske to the study of the new doctrines when they appeared, and it was an interest which he never lost.

... Fiske came to the doctrine of evolution as an ardent lover of human history, who above all longed to read the secret of how man came to believe, to aspire, to build up, and to transform, in the fashion that, in his religious, in his artistic, in his political, and in his moral activities, man has always followed. The consequences of this ruling tendency in our author appears ... in the prominence ... given to the problems of human development,—to the laws of history, to the evolution of doctrine, and to religious issues. It is also exemplified by his own principal contribution to evolutionary theory, viz. the doctrine of the significance of the prolongation of the period of infancy as a factor in the evolution of mankind. The same ruling tendency determines the prominence of historical writings in all the periods of his literary activity, and is above all responsible ... for the direction finally taken by his thought concerning the teleological interpretation of the process of evolution.⁷¹

view?" His reason for giving any attention to this problem, he said, was "simply for the purpose of guarding myself against the charges of atheism and materialism, which I foresaw would likely be made in its absence" (Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 368).

⁶⁹ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 231. Indeed, the whole of Part III of the book is directed to the problem of the relation of "Cosmic Philosophy" to theology and religion.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII, xxxix-xl.

⁷¹ Royce, in the introduction to *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, xl-xli. Cf. the statement of the reviewer of the book in the *Popular Science Monthly*, VI (Jan., 1875), 367: "... while Mr. Fiske has been predominantly influenced in his thinking by the views of Mr. Spencer, and has produced a work which will have great value to the students of that philosopher, ... it is plainly the product

The book was finished by the middle of February, 1874. It was published simultaneously in England and America in October of that year.⁷² The work was variously received. In England the reviews were favorable. Both Spencer and Darwin wrote soon to express their appreciation of the book which their own thoughts had helped to produce. Spencer, lamenting that he had not had time to read much of the book, found that the sections which he had read, "chiefly the new parts," pleased him. He studiously avoided, however, any reference to the religious implications of Fiske's work.⁷³ Darwin, pleading the inability to think deductively, nonetheless commented that he was happy to find that "here and there I had arrived from my own crude thoughts at some of the same conclusions with you; though I could seldom or never have given my reasons for such conclusions."⁷⁴

Whereas Spencer apparently considered Fiske's theological speculations out of place in a scientific work, it was this feature which drew the attention of the American reviewers. Many of them immediately classified Fiske's work as just a reworded statement of the old evolution argument. "'Cosmism,'" wrote M. Stuart Phelps of Yale, "is a very elegant dress for so old a skeleton to wear."⁷⁵ American theological orthodoxy rallied against the book with some rather caustic and bitter criticisms. Phelps began his article with the following caricature of Fiske's position:

of a course of thinking and study which has gathered materials from other regions of inquiry than those to which the English philosopher has chiefly devoted himself. We have here, not the work of a naturalist or a biologist, but rather of a literary writer, a student of history, philosophy, and theology, who, without presuming to speak with authority on matters of physical science, has still acquired an extensive familiarity with the methods upon which sound scientific conclusions are reached, and has derived from the various departments of natural knowledge no inconsiderable aid in forming and verifying his theory of things."

⁷² *Letters*, p. 307; Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 1.

⁷³ See Spencer's letter to Fiske (Dec. 11, 1874), in Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 58-59.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 60.

⁷⁵ M. Stuart Phelps, "Cosmism," *New Englander*, XXXIV (July, 1875), 554. Cf. "The Cosmic Philosophy," *Methodist Quarterly Review*, LVIII, N. S. XXVIII (Oct. 1876), 655-678, where the work is considered critically as a "popular exposition of the Spencerian philosophy."

In the continuous redistribution of Matter and Motion, there has at last been evolved, by integration of the homogeneous, the American Apostle of the Truth hitherto hidden from the eyes of man. A series of states of consciousness (plus a Something?), resident in Cambridge, has worked over a certain amount of sunshine, and has communicated it to the other possibly existing series of states of consciousness, in the shape of a book entitled *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*.⁷⁶

The *Methodist Quarterly Review*, while not doubting that Fiske thought he had "furnished a higher and truer conception of the world than that given by theistic philosophy," still questioned whether any system so full of "affronts to reason" and with a "logic . . . so partial or amphibious" could contribute much to the advance of either science or religion.⁷⁷ It was the reviewer for the *North American Review*, however, who sensed that in the work, in spite of all its avowed dependence upon Spencer, there was something new. Having argued that Fiske's interpretation of Spencerian philosophy really gave no answers to the problems he raised, the reviewer concluded with the "impression . . . that the philosophy of Mr. Spencer will not long content an active inquiring mind like his [Fiske's], but that he will by and by come to much better results on his own."⁷⁸

This impression was prophetic; it was from the point where he went beyond Spencer that Fiske developed his later philosophic thought. Part III of the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* was devoted to the consideration of the "corollaries" of Fiske's version of Spencer's philosophy, of the "sundry theological questions raised in the course of our Prologomena."⁷⁹ These "corollaries" included the problem of theism, the problem of matter and spirit, the relation of evolution to religious and ethical ideals, and the philosophic implications of the doctrine of evolution. "Cosmic Philosophy" provided the philosophic basis for these discussions, but Fiske never returned to rework this initial position. His

⁷⁶ Phelps, *op. cit.*, XXXIV, 530-531.

⁷⁷ "The Cosmic Philosophy," *Methodist Quarterly Review*, LVIII, 678.

⁷⁸ "Fiske's Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy," *North American Review*, CXX (Jan., 1875), 204.

⁷⁹ Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 177.

concern was elsewhere, in arguing for an "Unseen World," which transcends the phenomenal order, for a "Destiny of Man," which transcends his finite existence, for an "Idea of God," which transcends the anthropomorphisms of orthodoxy, for "The Everlasting Reality of Religion," as the "inward conviction of the craving for a final cause, the theistic assumption," that is itself "one of the master facts of the universe."⁸⁰ After 1874 Fiske was less concerned to defend the Spencerian position and more concerned to develop, in a positive way, a philosophical position from which could be effected the reconciliation of science and the basic religious beliefs which he felt orthodoxy had obscured.⁸¹ Later (1885), when he was accused of undergoing a "radical change" in his views, he insisted that such was not true. The reason for such misunderstanding, he felt, lay in the fact that his views on the doctrine of evolution and its implications had undergone some "development and enlargement." This modification resulted from an awareness of a "shortcoming in the earlier work."

That shortcoming was an imperfect appreciation of the goal toward which the process of evolution is tending, and a consequent failure to state adequately how the doctrine of evolution must affect our estimate of Man's place in Nature. . . . the doctrine of evolution, by exhibiting the development of the highest spiritual human qualities as the goal toward which God's creative work has from the outset been tending, replaces Man in his old position of headship in the universe, even as in the days of Dante and Aquinas. That which the pre-Copernican astronomy naïvely thought to do by placing the home of Man in the centre of the physical universe, the Darwinian biology profoundly accomplishes by exhibiting Man as the terminal fact in that stupendous process of evolution whereby things have come to be what they are. In the deepest sense it is as true as it ever was held to be, that the world was made for Man, and that

⁸⁰ Fiske, *Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 217.

⁸¹ Cf. W. H. Werkmeister, *A History of Philosophical Ideas in America* (New York, 1949), p. 96: "In the end he [Fiske] was compelled to go beyond Spencer's ideas in much the same way in which, earlier in his career, he had gone beyond Comte. His fundamentally religious interests could not be satisfied within the framework of Spencer's own ideas."

the bringing forth in him of those qualities which we call highest and holiest is the final cause of creation.⁸²

This new concern of Fiske is thus exhibited in a double interest: the recovery of teleology as the result of scientific investigation, and the centering of attention upon man. In this concern he was again representative of his time.

The scientific interest which had to do with the physical universe and with origins was a commanding interest of the seventh and eighth decades of the nineteenth century, from 1860 to 1880. It is not too much to say that in the ninth and tenth decades, interest swung back from the universe to its noblest inhabitant, from the natural to the human sciences. That profound scientific interest was in the last analysis a human interest, for it was seen that the physical sciences touch directly the origin, nature, and destination of man.⁸³

Fiske found literary outlet for this dual interest in two directions: first, in the return to his study of history and the subsequent writing of a number of historical works; second, in the attempt to recast what he considered to be the basic religious convictions of man in new terms. As an historian, he was concerned to show that human history itself told the story of evolution. It was his early intention to write the history of mankind with this in mind, and he never lost sight of that purpose. In the preface to *The Discovery of America* (1891) he wrote that his intention was "to awaken readers to the interest and importance of American archaeology for the general study of the evolution of human society."⁸⁴ This work was the first of seven volumes, reaching in their scope from the discovery of

⁸² Fiske, *The Idea of God, Writings*, XXI, 100-101.

⁸³ George Harris, *A Century's Change in Religion* (Boston and New York, 1914), p. 64. We may note here that the *Andover Review*, of which Harris was one of the editors and which began publication in 1884, was, from the beginning, concerned to apply the doctrine of evolution to all phases of man's existence. There was an emphasis upon the "creative factor" of man in evolution; a conviction that "all things point to man" and that man possesses all the qualities necessary for future development. See F. H. Johnson, "Theistic Evolution," *Andover Review*, I (April, 1884), 363-381; "Progressive Orthodoxy, II. Incarnation," *ibid.*, III (June, 1885), 554-564. Cf. Harris, *Moral Evolution* (New York, 1896), especially pp. 251 ff.

⁸⁴ Fiske, *The Discovery of America with some Account of Ancient America and the Spanish Conquest*, preface, *Writings*, I, xv-xvi.

America to the adoption of the Constitution. His historical work, therefore, was confined to American history for the most part,⁸⁵ but Fiske was convinced that the pattern of development which he found in his limited studies would be further exemplified in the whole of human history.

Noted as he was as an historian, it was nevertheless in his last several philosophical and theological works that Fiske appeared at his best. These essays⁸⁶ were in a real sense the final reconciliation of his evolutionary views with his religious convictions. "The center of all Fiske's intellectual interests," wrote Josiah Royce, "was always the love and study of mankind."⁸⁷ But back of this there lay a confidence, essentially a religious faith, in the essential goodness of human life, a conviction that the goal of life was something unseen, ideal and eternal, and that the real significance of life was something which yielded finally to a religious interpretation. He had subordinated these convictions to the search for adequate scientific verification, but he could not continue to ignore them. During this last period he returned, from time to time, to the task of expressing these central truths of religion freed of their "dogmatic wrappings."

Fiske's life from 1874 to 1901 was an extremely busy and rewarding one. He returned from England in the autumn of 1874 to resume his duties at the Harvard Library. Here he remained until the summer of 1878, when he received an invitation to give a course of six lectures in American history, during the following spring, at Old South Church in Boston. Fiske accepted and spent the next six months preparing his lectures in addition to carrying on his work at the library. He became so fascinated with the study that he began to explore the possibilities of making the writing of history a field of permanent

⁸⁵ The exceptions are his essays on the Aryan background of American ideas and traditions and the relevant sections of his book, *Myths and Myth-Makers*.

⁸⁶ "The Unseen World" (1875); *The Destiny of Man Viewed in the Light of His Origin* (1884); *The Idea of God as Affected by Modern Knowledge* (1885); *Through Nature to God* (1899); *Life Everlasting* (1901).

⁸⁷ Royce, "John Fiske as a Thinker," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, X (September, 1901), 32.

and fruitful labor. With the advice of his old professors, Gurney and Norton, and the historian Francis Parkman, he resigned his librarian's work in December, 1878 (effective in February, 1879), and began to make plans for the extensive work on American history.⁸⁸ The lectures in Boston were so successful that he immediately received requests to repeat them, both here and in England. When his friend T. H. Huxley assured him that one of the lecture halls of University College would be available for the lectures, Fiske decided to return to England. He set sail on May 24, 1879, for a two-month stay.⁸⁹ While he was in England he had opportunity to renew his talks with Huxley, Spencer, and Darwin, but this time the theme was history and evolution rather than cosmic philosophy. Fiske gave Spencer a general outline of his proposed work, which was to cover the following:

... the analysis of Anglo-American political ideas into their fundamental bases or elements; and then to show, on the one hand, that these bases are evolutionary products developed out of primitive Aryan civilization; while on the other hand, their further development among the nations of the earth must be a powerful influence making for universal peace.⁹⁰

Spencer's reply was in the form of an exhortation to make the broadest comparative study of primitive man possible the starting point, and concluded the interview with, "Go ahead, my dear fellow! You have the right conception of history, and you possess a remarkable power in the art of putting things."⁹¹

In one of the conversations with Huxley, the British scientist suggested that it would be possible to secure Fiske an invitation to address the Royal Institution during the following year.⁹² When he returned to America, therefore, he had two lines of work ready for him: a lecture tour for the following

⁸⁸ Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 71-73; *Letters*, pp. 377-378. The six lectures were: "The Era of Maritime Discovery," "Spanish and French Explorers and Colonists in America," "The Struggle between France and England," "The Thirteen English Colonies," "Causes of the American Revolution," "The Manifest Destiny of the English Race."

⁸⁹ Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 111-112.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 153.

⁹¹ *Letters*, p. 411.

autumn and winter and the preparation of the lectures for the Royal Institution.⁹³ In February, 1880, the official invitation from the Royal Institution arrived; the lectures were to begin on May 10. With that invitation came another from Dr. Muir of Edinburgh, asking Fiske to deliver a series of four of his American history lectures before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institute.⁹⁴

Prior to this trip, Fiske wrote to Charles Darwin expressing his desire to visit with him when he arrived in England. In this letter he included a statement which shows clearly the direction his thought was taking and to what extent he had ceased to be interested in the doctrine of evolution as such.

I am unable to follow you in detail quite as closely as I used to, for year by year I find myself studying more and more nothing but history. But Huxley told me last year that he thought I could do more for the "Doctrine of Evolution" in history than in any other line. To say that all my studies today owe their life to you would be to utter a superfluous compliment; for now it goes without saying that the discovery of "Natural Selection" has put the whole future thought of mankind on a new basis.⁹⁵

After a very successful series of lectures in England and Scotland, Fiske returned home and immediately began accepting lecture engagements for a third tour in America. This tour was to occupy all of the autumn and winter, extending through April of 1881.⁹⁶ Before embarking upon this trip, however, he engaged in a short literary battle with William James over the "Great Men in History" theory. Fiske's articles, "Sociology and Hero-Worship" (*Atlantic Monthly*, XLVII, January, 1881), "The Philosophy of Persecution" (*North American Review*,

⁹³ Fiske's lecture tour that season consisted of about seventy-five engagements in New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Washington, D. C. (*Letters*, p. 429).

⁹⁴ *Letters*, p. 430; Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 169. This second lecture tour in England, upon which Mrs. Fiske accompanied him, lasted from May 1 to July 26, 1880. The trip also included a visit to Paris where Fiske had hoped to deliver his lectures. The difficulty in securing an audience during July, however, forced postponement of this project (*Letters*, p. 447).

⁹⁵ *Letters*, p. 436.

⁹⁶ Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 191.

CXXXII, January, 1881), and "Heroes of Industry,"⁹⁷ were a defense of the Spencerian position which James had attacked.⁹⁸

The third lecture tour of Fiske took him through most of the New England and Middle Atlantic States and into the Midwest again. He had scarcely returned from this very strenuous trip when he received a request from Harper and Brothers, publishers, to open negotiations with them for a work on American history.⁹⁹ He was not long in coming to an agreement about such a work and immediately thereafter began to lay out plans for it. The original plans called for a three-volume work, but after Fiske had substantially completed this (by the spring of 1885), he became dissatisfied with the result. The agreement with Harper and Brothers was mutually canceled and he began planning an historical work which would give a philosophic as well as an historical presentation of the origin, development, and significance of the United States.¹⁰⁰

From 1881 until his death Fiske kept up a constant program of lecturing and writing. Most of his lectures were given from materials which were later incorporated in his books on American history. But his contributions during this last period were by no means limited to the area of history. We have already sug-

⁹⁷ This last article was written as the preface to the eighth volume of *The Hundred Greatest Men: Portraits Reproduced from Fine and Rare Engravings* (London, 1880). The eighth volume contained "Inventors and Discoverers." See Fiske, "Heroes of Industry," *Writings*, XIX, 184 n. 1.

James's article, "Great Men, Great Thoughts, and Their Environment," appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, XLVI (Oct., 1880), 441-459.

⁹⁸ During this period Fiske was a member of an unofficial "Metaphysical Club" at Harvard. Here he came into contact with some of the leading American thinkers of his day, among them being Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and Chauncey Wright. A detailed account of this club, its members, and its activities is given in Philip P. Wiener's *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949). For a discussion of Fiske's relationships to this group and of his controversy with James, see below, pp. 211-216.

⁹⁹ *Letters*, p. 466.

¹⁰⁰ Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 221, 338-340. This work was to be published in seven volumes by Houghton-Mifflin and Company, beginning in 1888: *The Critical Period in American History* (1888); *The Beginnings of New England* (1889); *The American Revolution* (1891); *The Discovery of America* (1892); *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors* (1897); *The Dutch and Quaker Colonies* (1899); *New France and New England* (1901).

During this period Fiske also published his three lectures on *American Political Ideas* (1885) and his work on *Civil Government in the United States* (1890).

gested that the height of his philosophical and theological thought was reached in the several books which he produced in this area after 1884. While the historical works constituted the larger part of the material written, Fiske was also actively at work in the attempt to effect the reconciliation of evolution and religion. This fact can be seen nowhere more clearly than in the address which he made at the famous dinner at Delmonico's, given in honor of Herbert Spencer on November 9, 1882. Spencer had been contemplating a visit to America for some years, and many of the American evolutionists were anxious for the British philosopher to come, hoping that his presence might stimulate greater interest in the philosophy which they had been supporting. Spencer arrived on August 21, 1882, but his enfeebled condition prevented the interviews which Youmans and others had hoped would result. Instead, most of the three months were spent in traveling about the eastern part of the United States. On Sunday, October 29, Spencer arrived in Cambridge to spend the day in the Fiske home. He and his traveling companion, a Mr. Lott, returned for lunch the following Tuesday and Fiske took the opportunity to escort Spencer through Harvard.¹⁰¹ Nine days later the farewell dinner planned by Youmans was held. Fiske was one among a number of dignitaries who were expected to make short addresses in tribute to Spencer and his work.¹⁰² His subject was "The Doctrine of Evolution and Religion." It was his intention, he said, "to point out . . . that Mr. Spencer's work on the side of religion will be seen to be no less important than his work on the side of science, when once its religious implications shall have been fully and consistently unfolded."¹⁰³ In order to sustain this point Fiske argued that, amid all the differences of the various forms of religions and religious beliefs, there were two things upon

¹⁰¹ *Letters*, pp. 476-478; Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 245 ff.

¹⁰² Actually only about five addresses were made, the others having been canceled in consideration of the fact that Spencer was not well and "appeared very tired." (*Letters*, p. 478; Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 261-262).

¹⁰³ Fiske, "Evolution and Religion," *Writings*, XIX, 270.

which all religions agree, one of speculative and the other of ethical import.

The first of these assertions is the proposition that the things and events of the world do not exist or occur blindly or irrelevantly, but that all, from the beginning to the end of time, and throughout the farthest sweep of illimitable space, are connected together as the orderly manifestations of a divine Power, and that this divine Power is something outside of ourselves, and upon it our own existence from moment to moment depends. The second of these assertions is the proposition that men ought to do certain things and ought to refrain from doing certain other things; and that the reason why some things are wrong to do and other things are right to do is in some mysterious but very real way connected with the existence and nature of this divine Power, which reveals itself in every great and every tiny thing. . . . ¹⁰⁴

It was these two "essential truths of religion" that evolution "asserts and reiterates." It asserts,

as the widest and deepest truth which the study of nature can disclose to us, that there exists a Power to which no limit in time or space is conceivable, and that all the phenomena of the universe, whether they be what we call material or what we call spiritual phenomena, are manifestations of this infinite and eternal Power.¹⁰⁵

As to the second truth of religion, here, as well, evolution gives an affirmative answer:

... when with Mr. Spencer we study the principles of right living as part and parcel of the whole doctrine of the development of life upon the earth; when we see that, in an ultimate analysis, that is right which tends to enhance fulness of life, and that is wrong which tends to detract from fulness of life,—we then see that the distinction between right and wrong is rooted in the deepest foundations of the universe; we see that the very same forces, subtle and exquisite and profound, which brought upon the scene the primal germs of life and caused them to unfold, . . . —we see that these very same subtle and exquisite forces have wrought into the very fibres of the universe those principles of right living which it is man's highest function to put into practice.¹⁰⁶

We have seen that in their earlier correspondence Spencer

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, XIX, 271.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, XIX, 274-275.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, XIX, 277.

tended to avoid Fiske's questions about the implications of his philosophy for religion. It is not strange, therefore, that Fiske should call this day the "most wonderful day in my life," when, as he finished speaking, Spencer took his hand and said, "Fiske, should you develop to the fullest the ideas you have expressed here this evening, I should regard it as a fitting supplement to my life-work."¹⁰⁷ That this reply was not just a courtesy suggested by the moment, is shown by a letter which Spencer wrote to Fiske on November 24, after he had returned to England. He regretted not having seen Fiske again before he left and continued:

I wanted to say how successful and how important I thought was your presentation of the dual aspect, theological and ethical, of the Evolution doctrine. It is above all things needful that the people should be impressed with the truth that the philosophy offered to them does not necessitate a divorce from their inherited conceptions concerning religion and morality, but merely a purification and exaltation of them. It was a great point to enunciate this view on an occasion ensuring wide distribution through the press. . . . Thank you for the aid thus given.¹⁰⁸

Whether or not Spencer agreed with the conclusions of Fiske, it is at least certain that he was not unwilling to have his name linked with the attempt at reconciliation which Fiske had started in that short address. Two years later, an admirable opportunity for a further development of this approach presented itself. The Concord School of Philosophy, at Concord, Massachusetts, had been established in 1879 as a sort of gathering place for philosophers and theologians who were concerned about the materialistic tendency of current scientific thought. For the 1884 session the faculty chose, as one of its topics for discussion, "Man's Immortality." Fiske was asked to speak on the general subject.¹⁰⁹ He accepted, and the address, delivered on July 31, 1884, was published later in that year as *The Destiny of Man*.

The address was an evolutionary approach to the problems of the social and individual destiny of man. Fiske's approach was

¹⁰⁷ *Letters*, p. 478.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 479.

¹⁰⁹ Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 308.

honest and simple: given the facts of man's evolutionary origin and his present developmental character, are there evidences that this life is legitimately terminal in itself, or are there implications of further conscious existence? Among the evidences of science, Fiske found the evidence of man's developing psychical powers, his "dawning consciousness," of significance.¹¹⁰ This, he felt, showed the direction of evolution: ". . . the case may be fitly summed up in the statement that whereas in its rude beginnings the psychical life was but an appendage to the body, in the fully-developed Humanity the body is but the vehicle for the soul."¹¹¹ The implications of this process, in the absence of either proof or denial, gave Fiske the basis for his faith in immortality.

The address was so well received that Fiske was asked to return for the next session (1885) and speak on any philosophical subject he would choose. He agreed, and set about organizing a short work on theism. "My address," he wrote, "was designed to introduce the discussion of the question whether pantheism is the legitimate outcome of modern science."¹¹² He reviewed the orderly progression of events which the evolutionary study of phenomena presented and suggested that, properly understood, this picture supported a theistic belief. His conclusion was really his mature confession of faith.

... it is no empty formula or metaphysical abstraction which we would seek to substitute for the living God. The infinite and eternal Power that is manifested in every pulsation of the universe is none other than the living God. . . . of some things we may feel sure. Humanity is not a mere local incident in an endless and aimless series of cosmical changes. The events of the universe are not the work of chance, neither are they the outcome of blind necessity. . . . When from the dawn of life we see all things working together toward the evolution of the highest spiritual attributes of Man, we know, however the words may stumble in which we try to say it, that God is in the deepest sense a moral Being. The everlasting source of phenomena is none other than the infinite Power that makes for righteousness.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Fiske, *The Destiny of Man, Writings*, XXI, 15-44; see especially pp. 23-24.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, XXI, 44.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 209-210.

¹¹² *The Idea of God, Writings*, XXI, 89.

Fiske's last two works in the area of religion are the collection of three addresses under the title *Through Nature to God* (1899), and the short address, delivered at Harvard in December, 1900, *Life Everlasting*. The opening section of the first book, "The Mystery of Evil," was a supplement to *The Idea of God* and constituted little, if any, alteration in the position set forth there.¹¹⁴ The second address, "The Cosmic Roots of Love and Self-Sacrifice," was a reply to T. H. Huxley's *Romanes Lectures* of 1893. Huxley's position had been that no sanction for morality could be found in the cosmic process: ". . . the practice of that which is ethically best," he wrote, "... involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence."¹¹⁵ In contrast to this position, Fiske restated the conviction, which he had expressed in *The Destiny of Man* and elsewhere, that it was possible to show that "the principles of morality have their roots in the deepest foundations of the universe, that the cosmic process is ethical in the profoundest sense"¹¹⁶ The third essay, "The Everlasting Reality of Religion," was, in many ways, Fiske's finest work. It was his last real effort to show that, far from being antagonistic to religion, evolution's greatest and clearest implication was the assertion of the "everlasting reality of religion." He closed with a statement of conviction that the things for which he had labored were at last achieved:

. . . we have at length reached a stage where it is becoming daily more and more apparent that with the deeper study of Nature the old strife between faith and knowledge is drawing to a close; and disentangled at last from that ancient slough of despond the Human Mind will breathe a freer air and enjoy a vastly extended horizon.¹¹⁷

In his last work, *Life Everlasting*, Fiske began with a recog-

¹¹⁴ *Through Nature to God*, preface, *Writings*, XXI, 215.

¹¹⁵ Huxley, "Evolution and Religion," The *Romanes Lecture*, 1893, in *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (New York, 1896), pp. 81-82.

¹¹⁶ *Through Nature to God*, *Writings*, XXI, 286.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XXI, 372-373.

nition of the "poetic conviction of immortality" and asked whether or not this faith could stand the test which modern evolutionary thought brought to it. His answer hung upon his examination of human consciousness. If we define consciousness as "a product of molecular motion," then we must infer that when such motion stops, consciousness ceases. "But if consciousness is a kind of existence which within our experience accompanies a certain phase of molecular motion, then the case is entirely altered, and the possibility or probability of the continuance of one without the other becomes a subject of further inquiry."¹¹⁸ It was this last position which he adopted, holding that it was in harmony with the doctrine of "correlation of forces" which he had set forth in *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*. The argument for immortality was thus freed from the limitations which the materialist laid upon it, and while this did not prove immortality, it did remove the objections to it and left the field clear for those "general considerations of philosophic analogy and moral probability which are all the guides upon which we can call for help in this arduous inquiry."¹¹⁹

The last fifteen years of Fiske's life were the years of reward and recognition.¹²⁰ In addition to the acclaim which his historical and religious works won for him, he was in constant demand as a lecturer. He accepted two invitations to speak on the Pacific Coast, one for an extended tour (May-June, 1887), and the other for a shorter trip climaxed by an oration at the centennial celebration of the discovery of the Columbia River at Astoria, Oregon, on May 11, 1892.¹²¹ In October of that year he was the principal speaker at the four hundredth anniversary celebration of the discovery of America, held in Boston. Among these invitations

¹¹⁸ *Life Everlasting*, Writings, XXI, 412.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XXI, 412-413.

¹²⁰ Fiske made a fourth and last trip to London early in 1883 for the purpose of consulting materials relevant to the background of American history in the British Museum. The visit was marred by illness and a sense of depression in finding so many of his old friends gone. As a result, he cut his stay short and returned home in April. See Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 266 ff.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, II, 357 ff, 439-441.

the one which his poor health prevented his accepting was the one which probably meant most to him. This was a request, in March, 1894, from the Department of University Extension of Oxford University, to lecture on American history in the seventeenth century during the summer session of that year.¹²² That same spring he received collegiate honors from the University of Pennsylvania and his alma mater which, to some extent at least, accorded him the recognition which he had long hoped would come through an appointment to a professorship.¹²³

His last major lecture appointment was for a course of twelve lectures at the Lowell Institute in Boston in February and March of 1901.¹²⁴ This invitation to speak where he had been refused in 1872 was witness both to the position which he had attained and to the overcoming of the prejudices which had denied him an earlier invitation. In the late spring of 1901 he was requested to be a representative of the New World to the millennial celebration in honor of King Alfred, which was to be held in Winchester, England, in September. The honor was so significant that, although in poor health, Fiske accepted and announced the topic for the requested address: "The Beginning of Federation in New England, as related to the Expansion of Alfred's World." The speech was to be an attempt to trace the evolutionary forces at work in the social and political life of the English people, with particular reference to the political federation which the English people of the United States had established. This process, he thought, was suggestive of how an even broader political integration and federation might be accomplished.¹²⁵ The rough drafts of this proposed speech give evidence that Fiske's mind was already beginning to explore the wider implications of the evolution-

¹²² *Ibid.*, II, 446-447.

¹²³ The University of Pennsylvania, on June 5, conferred upon him the degrees of M.A., LL.B., and Litt.D., while Harvard on June 27, conferred upon him the degrees of Litt.D. and LL.D. In the spring of 1901 President Hadley of Yale informed Fiske that Yale planned to award him the degree of LL.D. the following October. Fiske died, however, before this was conferred (*ibid.*, II, 448, 503).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 485.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 493 ff.

ary theory. But he did not live to develop these thoughts. During the last week of June he became seriously ill and died one week later, on July 7, 1901. The monument which marks his grave at Petersham bears the motto which had been, for almost his entire lifetime, descriptive of his life:

Disce, ut semper victurus;
Vive, ut cras morturus.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROOTS OF REBELLION

THE CONSISTENCY of Fiske's philosophical position has often been called into question. When his *The Destiny of Man* was published in 1884 a number of critics viewed the work as marking a definite "conversion" in his thought.¹ Fiske denied that there had been any such radical change and sought to explain the "misunderstanding" of his position by reference to certain "shortcomings" in his earlier works. "It would be little to my credit," he wrote, ". . . had my views of the doctrine of evolution and its implications undergone no development or enlargement since the publication of 'Cosmic Philosophy.'"² While his critics are partially right, especially if his works are considered from the standpoint of emphasis, Fiske's insistence upon the consistency of his thought was, in one sense, valid. It is true that the conclusions which he reached in his later books on religion and history had much more positive content than did the earlier works. But to say that these conclusions were "new" in any real sense is to misunderstand the relation between Fiske's intuitive convictions about the nature of man and the universe and his acceptance and

¹ Fiske, *The Idea of God*, introduction, *Writings*, XXI, 99-101. Cf. George Harris's review of *The Idea of God* in the *Andover Review*, V (Jan., 1886), 98-102. More recently this same suggestion of change from "Positivistic Sources" to "Idealistic Outcome" has received attention. See Wiener, *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*, pp. 136 ff.

² Fiske, *op. cit.*, XXI, 100-101.

use of the principle of interpretation which he found in the new science. A correct understanding of his thought, we believe, is to be found in considering his interest in scientific investigation as arising from his desire to find a surer ground for these intuitive convictions. It was this point which Josiah Royce made when he said that Fiske was moved primarily by an "intuitive assurance" but was "not only thus an intuitive believer."³ In order to grasp the thread of unity which runs throughout Fiske's works we must, therefore, distinguish between the essential faith which lies, expressed and unexpressed, behind all his works, and the way in which he sought to substantiate that essential faith.

The roots of Fiske's rebellion against religious orthodoxy reach far back into his early training and reading. At the center of that rebellion was what Royce has referred to as "a love and study of mankind." We have already noticed Fiske's early interest in writing a history of the development of mankind. In a letter to his mother (in March, 1860), upon the occasion of his formal break with the church in Middletown, he listed as one of the major reasons for the break the "benumbing effect" which orthodox creeds had upon the hopes of man.⁴ It was in the interest of finding a philosophical system which would give adequate attention and support to these hopes that he turned to von Humboldt, Buckle, and Comte in the years just prior to 1860. It was this same interest which lay back of his subsequent acceptance of the "evolutionary method" and which led him in later years to the writing of interpretative American history.⁵ The centrality of this conviction concerning the nature and destiny of man becomes most evident in Fiske's later writings on religious subjects, but its influence is never entirely absent, even in the

³ Royce, "John Fiske as a Thinker," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, X (Sept., 1901), 32.

⁴ *Letters*, pp. 31-34.

⁵ ". . . it was largely the absorbing and overwhelming passion for the study of history that first led me to study evolution in order to obtain a correct method. When one has frequent occasion to refer to the political and social *progress* of the human race, one likes to know what one is talking about" ("The Doctrine of Evolution: Its Scope and Purport," *Writings*, XXII, 40).

earliest works. The presence of the conviction, which was essentially an intuitive assurance, suggests the kinship between his thought and that of the liberal religious and philosophical writers of the earlier nineteenth century whom we know as the "Transcendentalists."

From the beginning of his literary career Fiske tried to find substantiation for these intuitive convictions in the scientific and philosophical writings of his day. These writings were to provide the fuel which kept the fire of his rebellion against orthodoxy burning. In his first letter to Herbert Spencer, on February 20, 1864, he gave his own account of his intellectual pilgrimage.

I was brought up in the most repulsive form of Calvinism in which I remained until I was sixteen years of age. My skepticism, excited in 1858 by geological speculations, was confirmed in the following year by the work of Mr. Buckle.

At the time when I reviewed Buckle I was just passing out from Comtism. During six months of incessant study and reflection my former idols were all demolished. Having successively adopted and rejected the system of almost every philosopher from Descartes to Professor Ferrier, I began the year 1860 with Comte, Mill, and Lewes. I then favored the scheme of acquiring a general knowledge of all the sciences in their hierarchical order as laid down by Comte, which scheme was eventually carried out. I first noticed your name in Mr. Lewes's little exposition of Comte early in 1860, and the extract from "Social Statics" there given led me to put down my name for "First Principles," before there could have been as yet more than a dozen subscribers.

It is unnecessary to enter into further details. The influence of your writings is apparent alike in every line of my writings and every sentence of my conversation: so inextricably have they become intertwined with my own thinking, that frequently on making a new generalization, I scarcely know whether to credit myself with it or not.⁶

In his later writings Fiske was to move beyond Spencer and become a much more original thinker than this early letter suggests. But in the early 1860's he was satisfied that he had found in Spencer's writings the key to a new "Cosmic Philosophy" which, while taking account of and utilizing the most advanced scientific

⁶ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 294-295.

thought of his day, made possible a defense of those convictions which were a part of his religious heritage.

I. THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

One movement in particular helped to form the religious and intellectual mood to which Fiske was heir, the transcendentalist Unitarianism of which Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker were significant representatives. The whole Unitarian movement had been in the direction of a liberal Christianity, and during the 1820's it had been one of the major "modernisms" against which orthodox Calvinism had fought. Later in the century Unitarianism itself was to be modified by the movement we have come to call "Transcendentalism," and new lines of battle were drawn between the "old-line liberals" and the "new radicals."⁷ Fiske heralded this latter movement as the culmination of the American struggle for liberal thought.

In the early part of the present century, the most advanced phase of liberal thought, represented by the Unitarians in Massachusetts, was trying to hold an utterly untenable position, halfway between narrow orthodoxy and untrammelled free thinking, when the ground began to be cut from under it by the transcendentalists, whose native temperaments, not wanting in kinship with that of Edwards, were stimulated by a brief contact with Kantian and post-Kantian speculation in Germany. In Emerson's poetic soul the result was a seminal influence upon high thinking, in America and in the Old World, the power of which we cannot but feel, but which it is as yet too soon to estimate. In the middle of the century some wholesome destructive work still needed to be done, and it was well done. When German criticism, with the other weapons in the powerful hands of Theodore Parker, freed us from the spectre of bibliolatry, it might indeed to be said that the promise of the Protestant Reformation was at length fulfilled.⁸

One of the major points of disagreement between the older Unitarian group and the Transcendentalist Unitarians was in relation to the theory of religious knowledge. The older rational-

⁷ H. Shelton Smith, "Was Theodore Parker A Transcendentalist?" *New England Quarterly Review*, XXIII (Sept. 1950), 353.

⁸ "The Origins of Liberal Thought in America," *Writings*, XXII, 144.

istic group, of whom Andrews Norton was the "uncrowned 'Pope,'"⁹ held to an epistemology derived from Lockean empiricism.¹⁰ It was against this denial of religious intuitionism that the younger group of Unitarians revolted in the 1830's. The distinguishing mark of these "transcendentalists" became, therefore, "their espousal of an intuitional theory of religious knowledge."¹¹

Emerson gave voice to the new thoughts in his Divinity School Address of 1838, and some time later (1842), after the storm had broken, he set down the basic tenets of the new movement in his essay on "Transcendentalism." Here we find the insistence upon freedom and individuality, rooted in the faith in the essential dignity of human nature, which was to characterize the thought to which Fiske was indebted.

The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine. He believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy. He wishes that the spiritual principle should be suffered to demonstrate itself to the end, in all possible applications to the state of man, without the admission of anything unspiritual; that is, anything positive, dogmatic, personal. Thus the spiritual measure of inspiration is the depth of the thought, and never, who said it? And so he resists all attempts to palm other rules and measures on the spirit than its own.¹²

This "tendency to respect the intuitions" and to give them "all authority over our experience" was Emerson's definition of the essence of the "creed" of transcendentalism.¹³ To this he was

⁹ Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists, An Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 11.

¹⁰ Smith, *op. cit.*, *New England Quarterly Review*, XXIII, 353.

¹¹ Smith, *op. cit.*, *New England Quarterly Review*, XXIII, 363; cf. Clarence L. F. Gohdes, *The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism* (Durham, N. C., 1931), pp. 10-11: "Essentially it [Transcendentalism] sought to find the source of all truth within the nature of man. . . . Its fundamental principle [was] a belief in the infallibility of intuition. . . ."

¹² Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, with a biographical introduction and notes by Edward Waldo Emerson and a general index (Centenary Edition; Boston and New York, 1903-1904), I, 335-336.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, 340.

to add an optimistic note of progress: "No statement of the Universe can have any soundness which does not admit its ascending effort."¹⁴ The "book of Nature" was a record of the "rude forms, in which she has only blocked out her future statue, concealing under unwieldy monsters the fine type of her coming king."¹⁵ The race thus produced, while not the best, was yet "the best that could live now," and the future held promise of improvement.

The first and worse races are dead. The second and imperfect races are dying out, or remain for the maturing of higher. In the latest race, in man, every generosity, every new perception, the love and praise he extorts from his fellows, are certificates of advance out of fate into freedom. Liberation of the will from the sheaths and clogs of organization which he has outgrown, is the end and aim of this world.¹⁶

Fiske was to respond positively to this emphasis upon freedom, individuality, and progress. Although there is no evidence that he was directly indebted to Emerson, we do have a record of a meeting between the two in September of 1860. After that meeting Fiske spoke in terms of high praise of the "philosopher at Concord." They had discussed Voltaire, Buckle, and others, and Fiske observed;

I didn't expect to find him booked on science, but I find him tremendously so. I was astonished not only at his learning, but also at the wisdom which lurked in everything he said, and at his goodness. . . . I thought him the greatest man I ever saw. . . . Of all the men I ever saw, none can be compared with him for depth, for scholarship, and for attractiveness,—at least so I think.¹⁷

The union of intuitive philosophic insight and interest in science which Fiske observed in Emerson must have impressed the young Harvard student. It is significant that in Fiske's later years he found much in Emerson's thought that was in harmony with his own position. John Spencer Clark has written of a conversation with Fiske in the late 1890's in which they discussed

¹⁴ Emerson, "Fate," *ibid.*, VI, 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, 35-36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 15.

¹⁷ *Letters*, p. 52.

Cabot's *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Fiske remarked that he was struck by the fact that from the beginning of his literary career, "Emerson gave unmistakable evidence of an evolutionary tendency in his line of thought."¹⁸ Clark suggested, in the light of this late evaluation of Emerson by Fiske, that Fiske's "philosophico-religious thought . . . consists in a happy blending of the poetic philosophico-religious insight of Emerson with the profound scientific cosmic truths established by Spencer and Darwin."¹⁹ This "blending," however, was not just a process of joining mutually acceptable ideas or conclusions. Like Emerson, Fiske held his convictions intuitively. But Fiske's acceptance of Emerson's ideas was modified by the scientific thought which had been advanced in the middle of the nineteenth century. While Emerson did not ignore the importance of historical and scientific data and procedure,²⁰ he gave less attention to them than Fiske found necessary for an adequate theory of knowledge. Emerson relied too heavily upon "Inspiration," according to Fiske, and needed to balance that reliance with an "appeal to human reason . . . based upon a mass of well-verified facts."²¹

Theodore Parker came closer to doing what Fiske himself later tried to do: to establish the intuitive convictions of man upon a scientific foundation. For Parker, it is true, the "primary intuitions" were self-authenticating, but he did not deny that inductive reasoning could and did support the convictions arising from those intuitions.²² Fiske referred very little to Parker, but

¹⁸ Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 476.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 482.

²⁰ Cf. Smith, *op. cit.*, *New England Quarterly Review*, XXIII, 364 n. 35.

²¹ Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 481.

²² Cf. Smith, *op. cit.*, *New England Quarterly Review*, XXIII, 358-359. This is the point which John Edward Dirks emphasizes, perhaps too strongly: "He [Parker] believed that the inductive and deductive methods are supplementary, that the judgments of reason are validated empirically through the scientific study of historical data, that 'facts of intuition' are not incompatible with the concepts of the understanding. When he did, on occasion, utilize the 'transcendental appeal,' he considered it inadequate until it was validated by generic human experience. Thus, in his philosophy, Parker 'mediated' between the critical and objective approach and the more subjective emphasis of the transcendental temper" (*The Critical Theology of Theodore Parker*, New York, 1948, pp. 133-134).

the few references which are made are sufficient to suggest that he had read some of Parker's works and knew of his liberal position.²³ While Fiske did not settle in Cambridge and Boston until 1860, after Parker had died, the young Fiske could not have been unaware of the work of one who was so widely known to support the very position which he found congenial. In the absence of specific information, the comparison of the interests of the two is very suggestive.

Both Parker and Fiske began the constructive period of their lives with the intention of writing a history of the religious development of man.²⁴ Although neither actually fulfilled this intention, it remained with both of them and accounted in part for the attitude with which they approached their work. Both were early trained in the scientific writings of their day and were well-versed in the writings of the philosophers of the Enlightenment and their successors in Europe and Britain. Both found the

²³ Fiske referred to Parker in three different connections. In the article on Lessing in 1868 ("Nathan the Wise"), he mentioned briefly the contrast between Parker's and Lessing's liberal thought, pointing out that Lessing "cannot be considered an antagonist of Christianity, neither did he assume the attitude of a defender." Parker, on the other hand, as a Christian preacher, was concerned "to defend and strengthen the Christian religion by relieving it of those peculiar doctrines which . . . were a stumbling block and an offense" (*Writings*, XVIII, 203 ff.).

In the article on "The Causes of Persecution" (1880), Fiske had one reference to Parker's attitude toward the problem of the justice of God: "The sermons of Theodore Parker on the popular theology well illustrate the change of mood that has come over men's minds with reference to the justice of God: the whole burden of these discourses is the argument that the infliction of endless suffering on the creature is incompatible with infinite justice on the part of the Creator" (*Writings*, XIX, 206).

In the article on "The True Lesson of Protestantism" (1881), Fiske referred to the change in the popular attitude toward the critical study of the Scriptures. He pointed out that whereas it was now customary for the clergy to present and defend the works of Strauss, Renan, and others, this attitude had not long prevailed: ". . . it is well not to forget that, forty years ago, Theodore Parker was virtually driven out of the Unitarian Church for saying the same sort of thing which may be heard today from half the Unitarian pulpits in New England" (*Writings*, XIX, 246).

²⁴ Parker, "Some Account of My Ministry," *Works* (Centenary Edition, edited with notes by Rufus Leighton; Boston, 1907-1913), XIII, 315: "After I became a minister I laid out an extensive plan of study, a continuation of previous work. I intended to write a 'History of the Progressive Development of Religion among the leading Races of Mankind.' Cf. Fiske's letter to Abby Morgan Brooks, where he speaks of his intention to write "a history of the religious development of mankind" (Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 257).

work of Alexander von Humboldt stimulating to their early thought and retained something of the German scholar's interest in combining "all cosmical phenomena in one sole picture of nature." Parker once referred to Humboldt as the "grandest scholar of all Christendom," and paid tribute to his great vision of the unity and beauty of nature.

Von Humboldt—laborious still, grown old in being taught and teaching, his mind youthful with all the scientific riches of the world swept into the German Ocean of his long living consciousness,—groups into a harmonious whole this cosmos of material force, painting in words the universe, this majestic Amazonian flower of God floating upon the sea of space. And what a world of harmonious beauty it is, as seen by the material eye and then reflected in the educated mind of . . . philosophers.²⁵

In his account of the development of his thought, Parker recorded that he had an "original fondness for scientific and metaphysical thought," and that his early reading in these areas came to be of great service in the formulation of his liberal religious creed.²⁶ It was in Immanuel Kant's works, he said, that he found the "true method" which put him on the road to an adequate and satisfactory epistemology. The core of this position he found in three "great primal intuitions of human nature, . . . facts of consciousness given by the instinctive action of human nature itself": "the instinctive intuition of the divine," "the instinctive intuition of the just and right," and "the instinctive intuition of the immortal." The contents of these intuitions he then developed through an historical and psychological study of mankind.²⁷ For an adequate theory of knowledge, therefore, Parker turned (as Fiske was later to do) to the "authority in the nature of man—in the facts of consciousness within me, and the facts of observation in the human world without." Neither

²⁵ Parker, "Of the Economy of Pain and Misery under the Universal Providence of God," *ibid.*, II, 344.

²⁶ "Experience as a Minister," *ibid.*, XIII, 293 ff.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 301 ff. Cf. Fiske's statement of the three great universal assumptions presents in all religious thought: "the Quasi-Human God," "the undying human soul," and "the ethical significance of the unseen world" (*Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 349 ff.).

the Church nor the Scriptures nor the nonhuman world could provide the insights into true religion which were to be found in the "nature of man," in the "facts of intuition."²⁸ Parker thought that the study of the substance of human intuitions and of the laws which were evident in the universe of human life would eventually lead to a grand science of mankind: "Oh, that some young genius would devise the 'novum organum' of humanity, determine the 'principia' thereof, and with deeper than mathematical science, write out the formulas of the human universe, the celestial mechanics of mankind."²⁹

Whether or not Fiske had read this specific challenge from Parker, his own work was a response to the ideal which it expressed and which was a part of the liberal New England temperament of the middle nineteenth century. Although Fiske's early reaction against orthodoxy was so complete as to make him skeptical even of the liberal Unitarianism that Parker represented, the latter's vision of the "science of mankind" based upon the study of human nature, upon the intellectual, moral, and religious consciousness of man, became Fiske's own vision and inspiration. The impact of scientific evolutionism upon his early thought was so strong that he sought more empirical verification for his intuitions and made their validity more dependent upon such verification than Parker thought necessary or proper. Nonetheless, the similarity between the two is unmistakable. The correspondence between Parker's three "primal intuitions" and Fiske's "universal assumptions" of religion suggests the kinship of their basic positions. We shall see that as Fiske's thoughts developed he tended to come closer to the transcendentalist position of allowing these assumptions to have, for the individual, the same validity with which Parker and others had credited the intuitions.

²⁸ "Experience as a Minister," *Works*, XIII, 337. "I try all things by the human faculties, intellectual things by the intellect, moral things by the conscience, affectional things by the affections and religious things by the soul" ("Some Account of My Ministry," *ibid.*, XIII, 62).

²⁹ "Experience as a Minister," *ibid.*, XIII, 395.

During Fiske's early life there were contacts with other liberal thinkers, some of whom were Unitarian ministers. One of the first and most important of these was the Reverend John Langdon Dudley, the pastor of the South Congregational Church in Middletown. Fiske first met him in 1859 and the two remained fast friends for a number of years thereafter. Although the pastor of an orthodox church, Dudley was considered to hold extremely liberal views. Clark describes him as a "sort of Fichtean Emersonian Transcendentalist, who was endeavoring to find points of agreement between the assumptions of Christian theology and the claims of the Transcendentalists of the innate existence in the consciousness of man of the Divine Immanence that makes for righteousness."³⁰ The optimistic and liberal approach to theology which Fiske found in Dudley made a lasting impression upon his thought. In 1883 he acknowledged the debt which he owed to this minister by dedicating his *Excursions of an Evolutionist* to him.

Quarter of a century has passed since I used to listen with delight to your preaching and come to you for sympathy and counsel in my studies. . . . I know of no one who understands more thoroughly or feels more keenly how it is that if we would fain learn something of the Infinite, we must not sit idly repeating the formulas of other men and other days, but must gird up our loins anew, and diligently explore on every side that finite realm through which still shines the glory of an ever-present God for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.³¹

The intellectual temper of liberal New England in the 1860's is perhaps nowhere so evident as in the development of the "Free Religious Association," which was formally organized in Boston on May 30, 1867. There is no evidence that Fiske was a member of the group, but some of his friends were members and the "creed" of the Association bears much similarity to Fiske's

³⁰ Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 110. Cf. Fiske's letter of Nov. 15, 1859, where he spoke of Dudley as "a Fichtean, Carlylean, Emersonian, or something of the kind" (*Letters*, p. 30).

³¹ Fiske, [Dedication of] *Excursions of an Evolutionist*, *Writings*, XIX.

thought.³² Emerson presided at the organizational meeting; and among the prominent members of the group was Francis Ellingwood Abbot whom Fiske knew, at least in later years at Harvard.³³ Whether he had any formal connection with the group or not, Fiske's own thought certainly springs from the same liberal sources which gave rise to the Free Religious Association.

In the second volume of the Association's official publication, the *Index*, Abbot gave a "synopsis of Free Religion," a personal interpretation of what the Free Religious movement believed. He listed seven cardinal beliefs, each one of which can be paralleled to some extent in Fiske's own writings.³⁴

I. He criticized orthodox Christianity as demanding "absolute and unreasoning submission from the human mind. . . . It is the worst enemy of liberty, science, and civilization, because it is organized *Despair of Man*."

II. Free Religion based its creed upon the "claim on the natural perception of truth by the universal reason of the race; that is, on the principle of *Human Freedom*." It is "organized *Faith in Man*."

III. The contrast between older Christianity and Free Religion was to be found in the "conflict of principles, aims, and methods. The one ruled the world in the Dark Ages of the past. The other will rule the world in the Light Ages of the future."

IV. Free Religion emphasized the "Unity of the Universe." Nature was seen as an "organic, living whole," to be interpreted under one basic Law. Immanentism was indicated and accepted.

V. Free Religion emphasized the "Unity of Mankind." This involved a belief that the "destiny of the human race is one, in virtue of a slow but constant progress towards a universal and perfect civilization."

³² Clark does refer to a "Sunday discourse delivered, I think, before the Free Religious Association, in Boston," by Fiske in 1874 (Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 52).

³³ Cf. Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought, An Intellectual History since 1815* (New York, 1940), pp. 175-176.

³⁴ All of the following excerpts are from "Modern Principles: A Synopsis of Free Religion," *Index*, II (No. 1, Jan. 7, 1871), 1.

VI. Free Religion emphasized the "Unity of the Person," meaning that attainment of character was "based on the principle that the liberty of every faculty is absolute in the exercise of its natural function," and that such liberty made possible a nobler character.

VII. Free Religion emphasized the "Unity of Unities," meaning "the eternal harmony of Nature in the life of the race and the life of the individual." The individual mirrored the "macrocosmic" unity.

While Fiske's later writings suggested a less radical divorce from traditional Christianity, these statements serve well to suggest the atmosphere which surrounded the young liberal at Harvard in the early 1860's. Whatever his attitude toward the Association might have been, he could not have escaped the influence which these left-wing liberals exerted. Their ideals of freedom and liberty of the human being, the unity of all things, and the conviction of constant progress toward a better human society were the ideals of Fiske as well.

Although the influence of the liberal, transcendental movement was deeply rooted in Fiske's thought, it would be a mistake to conclude that he accepted the intuitive theory of knowledge without modification. We shall see that he tried to revise this theory by modifying it with the Lockean position. This revision, he felt, could be accomplished by the proper use of the theory of evolution. The end result would be a dual epistemological position, maintaining the intuitive theory from the standpoint of the individual, and the empirical theory, as modified by Spencer, from the standpoint of the race as an evolutionary whole. We need to recognize, however, that from 1860 on, when Fiske spoke of "religion" he referred primarily to this liberal, transcendentalist tradition. It was this tradition which he felt could be "reconciled" to science in such a way that the results of the latter would substantiate the convictions of the former. His task was simplified here to a great extent because he emphasized in that religious tradition those principles which could be most

easily "reconciled"; that is, the emphasis upon the freedom and dignity of human nature, the assertion of individuality, and the conviction that truth in religion could be arrived at apart from dogmatic pronouncements.³⁵ The "scientific method" with which Fiske was to attempt the verification of the individual intuitions was to be derived primarily from Spencer's "Synthetic Philosophy." Prior to his reading of Spencer, however, he went through a period in which the general approach of Positivism appealed to him. Our examination of the sources of his "scientific" thought must begin, therefore, with his early interest in this system.

II. THROUGH POSITIVISM TO COSMISM

All of Fiske's writings came after he had turned from Comtean Positivism to Spencer's "Synthetic Philosophy." His criticism of Comte does not, therefore, do justice to the influence which Comte had upon his earlier thought. Indeed, he later denied that he had ever been a "Positivist" in the sense that this philosophy was popularly understood. While this is in part true, the fact remains that when he was called before President Felton in 1861 and asked to explain his position, he admitted adherence to the "Positive Philosophy." It was only after reading Spencer that he seemed to become aware of the "serious shortcomings" of Comte's position, and in 1870-1871 there was still some disagreement between Spencer and Fiske over the question of how "positivistic" the Synthetic Philosophy was.³⁶

In order to understand just what Comte's influence upon Fiske was and what that weakness was in the former's system

³⁵ Fiske's conviction of the validity of these principles resulted in a somewhat humanistic statement of the value of the Protestant Reformation: ". . . the Protestantism of Luther is significant mainly as a revolt against primeval notions of the relations of the individual to the community, which have long survived their usefulness. Obviously the disintegration of orthodoxies which characterizes the present age is simply the further development of the same protest in behalf of individual responsibility for opinion" ("The True Lesson of Protestantism," *Writings*, XIX, 262-263).

³⁶ See Spencer's letter of Feb. 2, 1870, and Fiske's belated reply in September of 1871 (Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 366-370, 383-385).

which later appeared in the light of Spencer's writings, we must return to 1858, when Fiske began reading Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos*. Humboldt's work was written in 1843-1844 and based upon lectures which he had given in Europe almost twenty years previously.³⁷ His intention was threefold: ". . . to combine all cosmical phenomena in one sole picture of nature; to show in what manner the common conditions, that is to say, the great laws, by which individual groups of these phenomena are governed, have been recognized; and what course has been pursued in ascending from these laws to the discovery of their causal connexion."³⁸ As a scientist and a scientific historian he was prepared to limit his investigation of nature "to the domain of empirical ideas." The "physical description of the universe" was dependent upon observation of and generalization from observable phenomena.

Such an attempt to comprehend the plan of the universe—the order of nature—must begin with a generalization of particular facts, and a knowledge of the conditions under which physical changes regularly and periodically manifest themselves; and must conduct to the thoughtful consideration of the results yielded by empirical observation, but not to "a contemplation of the universe based on speculative deductions and development of thought alone, or to a theory of absolute unity independent of experience."³⁹

"Nature," however, was to be interpreted as having both objective and subjective aspects. In the first place, Nature was to be seen in the "pure objectiveness of external phenomena." But secondly, an adequate description must also include Nature as "the reflection of the image impressed by the senses upon the inner man, that is, upon his ideas and feelings."⁴⁰ This latter was just as essential to a portrayal of the "domain of the *Cosmos*" as the phenomena of the external world because "Man elaborates

³⁷ Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*, translated from the German by E. C. Otté (London, 1849-1852), I, xii; III, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 7.

³⁹ *Idem*. Cf. I, 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 1.

within himself the materials presented to him by the senses." To deny to the products of this "spiritual labour" a place in the total account was to complete only half the picture.⁴¹ Humboldt admitted that the encyclopedic difficulties of this approach prevented any claim of completeness. Especially was this true of the second aspect of Nature, that concerned with the "spiritual life."⁴² He warned against the delusion of some men "that they had reached the goal, and discovered the principle which could explain all that is variable in the organic world, and all the phenomena revealed to us by sensuous perception."⁴³ For the most part, he said, we must still "content ourselves with the recognition of empirical laws." The highest we can ever aspire, and this will be attained only rarely, will be "the discovery of their *causal connexion*." Where these laws of phenomena admit of reference to "mathematical principles of explanation" we have the most satisfactory and distinct evidence of such connection.⁴⁴ Until we have reached the place in our investigation where we can establish the causes and mutual connections of all observable facts, we cannot, for example, depict "the present condition of things as one of development."⁴⁵ Nature was to be viewed, therefore, as "that which is ever growing and ever unfolding itself in new forms." Each law, discovered in the "midst of the universal fluctuation of phenomena and vital forces—in that inextricable network of organisms by turns de-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, III, 4. Humboldt attributed the differences in the "intensity in the love of nature, and the animation in the mode of its expression" which are to be found by the historian, to "differences in race, to the peculiar influence of the configuration of the soil, the form of government, and the character of religious belief" (*ibid.*, II, 411).

⁴² *Ibid.*, III, 5. Thus he limits his own consideration in this area to concentration on "those objects which lie in the direction of long-cherished studies; on the manifestation of a more or less lively appreciation of nature in classical antiquity and in modern times; on the fragments of poetical descriptions of nature, the colouring of which has been so essentially influenced by individuality of national character, and the religious monotheistic view of creation; on the fascinating charm of landscape-painting; and on the history of the contemplation of the physical universe, that is, the history of the recognition of the universe as a whole, and of the unity of phenomena."

⁴³ *Ibid.*, III, 8-9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 7-8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 28.

veloped and destroyed," indicated the existence of some other more general law.⁴⁶ To the untrained observer this method might seem but the leaving of one labyrinth for another, larger and more confusing. But Humboldt was convinced that the physical description of the universe, the "science of the Cosmos," in the hands of a "powerful intellect," could "succeed in dispelling a portion of the contradictions, which, at first sight, appear to arise from the complication of phenomena and the multitude of perturbations simultaneously manifested." Eventually, knowledge of the laws of nature would banish the "chimera . . . cherished by the human mind in its early and intuitive contemplations." Belief in the "discord of the elements" would gradually vanish as science extended her empire.⁴⁷

Could this same empirical method of investigation be applied to the study of man? Might this approach yield an answer to the old question about the "affinity of races" or to the debate over regarding races as "originally different species" or as "mere varieties"? Humboldt was cautious in his answer. He did venture to assert that,

In my opinion . . . powerful reasons can be advanced in support of the theory of the unity of the human race, as, for instance, in the many intermediate gradations in the colour of the skin and in the form of the skull, which have been made known to us in recent times by the rapid progress of geographical knowledge . . . and the more correct observations collected regarding the limits of fecundity in hybrids.⁴⁸

He warned, however, that inductive reasoning or experience could yield no final answer to the "great problem of the first origin." Comparative philological studies might help toward a solution, but their usefulness was limited by the difficulty in discerning the many factors which influenced the development of dialects. ". . . language is a part and parcel of the history of the development of mind; and, however happily the human intellect, under the most dissimilar physical conditions, may

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 20, 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 361-362.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 22.

unfettered pursue a self-chosen track, and strive to free itself from the dominion of terrestrial influences, this emancipation is never perfect.”⁴⁹ The unity of mankind was to be held as a firm belief, but its strongest evidences were to be found “deeply rooted in the innermost nature of man” where empirical observation could not enter: in man’s ideals, in his aspirations for the future of himself and society, in the longing for the unknown and the remembrance of the past through which he was lifted above an “exclusive attachment to the present.” Thus, while the natural phenomena of the universe, for the most part, yielded to arrangement according to partially known laws, man really eluded the scientists’ quest.

... other laws of a more mysterious nature rule the higher spheres of the organic world, in which is comprised the human species in all its varied conformation, its creative intellectual power, and the languages to which it has given existence. A physical delineation of nature terminates at the point where the sphere of intellect begins, and a new world of mind is opened to our view. It marks the limit but does not pass it.⁵⁰

When Fiske began reading Humboldt’s work he was impressed by the contrast between the German scientist’s presentation and interpretation of the universe and the orthodox theological presentation of cosmology. Humboldt’s caution against assuming that we know more about the cosmos, its particular events and individuals, than we actually do, added fuel to the skepticism which was already developing in Fiske’s mind concerning the assertions of dogmatic theology. Two things in particular seemed to attract Fiske’s attention in Humboldt’s presentation. The first (and this he never ceased to admire) was the encyclopedic character of the work. *Cosmos* presented a veritable storehouse of established facts from which the laws of the universe might be derived. The second was the avowed attempt to present the “history of the gradual development of the knowledge of the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 365-367.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 369.

universe as a whole.”⁵¹ This panorama of the discovery of laws and the critical appraisal of every acquisition of knowledge about the universe served a dual purpose. It showed the dangers inherent in overhasty generalizations, while, at the same time, it held out a hope that the extension of the empirical method would eventually “enable man to subject to his control separate domains of nature, and to approximate to a more animated recognition of the universe as a whole.”⁵² Later Fiske was to criticize Humboldt as “to all intents and purposes, a materialist of the eighteenth century,” whose work had lacked “any pervading principle of unity.”⁵³ But that criticism was made long after the Spencerian formulation of the law of evolution had provided a new way of interpreting the cosmos. The significant fact is that, in 1858, Humboldt’s work provided Fiske with what he then considered to be a better system through which to establish his convictions about the progress of man and the “dramatic purposes of things” than did the orthodox theology of the day.

Fiske’s temporary acceptance of the limited inductive method suggested by Humboldt is evidenced in his criticism of Buckle’s *History of Civilization in England*. His first reaction upon reading the two authors’ works was that “all that Humboldt says goes to prove that Buckle’s system is founded on a very broad and comprehensive generalization.”⁵⁴ At the time when he reviewed Buckle (1861) he was so impressed with the historian’s “diligence, his honesty, his freedom of thought, his bold outspokenness, his hearty admiration for whatever is good and great in man,” that he was inclined to overlook the “inaccuracies and errors.”⁵⁵ Fifteen years later, however, when Buckle’s popularity had faded, Fiske was uncompromising in his denunciation of the “essentially superficial character” of his thought.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II, 738. This was what Humboldt tried to do in his second volume; it is significant that it was this volume which Fiske found most stimulating. (See his letter to his mother, dated Sept. 22, 1859, *Letters*, p. 29.)

⁵² *Ibid.*, II, 742.

⁵³ Fiske, *Through Nature to God*, preface, *Writings*, XXI, 219, 220.

⁵⁴ *Letters*, p. 29.

⁵⁵ “Mr. Buckle’s Fallacies,” *Writings*, XX, 194, 195.

He [Buckle] began life with his full share of the "original sin" of hasty generalization; and nothing in his circumstances tended to check or control this disposition. . . .

Not only did Mr. Buckle's impatient and uncritical habit prevent his vast reading from resulting in sound scholarship, but his lack of subtlety and precision was so marked as to stamp all his thinking with the character of shallowness. He seized readily upon the broader and vaguer distinctions among things . . . and of such raw material, without further analysis, and without suspecting the need for further analysis, he constructed his historical theories.⁵⁶

There was nothing in Buckle's work, Fiske wrote, which really attempted to go beyond the collection of "miscellaneous evidence for the statements in their rough, ready-made form" to the formulation of sound "generalizations that go below the surface of things."⁵⁷

While Fiske criticized Buckle in the light of the more accurate Humboldt, Buckle's work did lead him to considerations which were to cause him to leave the more cautious and restricted system of Humboldt behind. The "pervading principle of unity" which he found lacking in Humboldt's rigidly empiricistic method became the very thing he felt to be essential to the interpretation of the objective and subjective forces in the development of civilization. He responded favorably to Buckle's thesis that the time had arrived to attempt some statement of the unity and pattern of the events in man's history, to raise the study of human actions "to the rank of a science."⁵⁸ The question with which Buckle began was one which Fiske had already answered for himself: "Are the actions of man, and therefore of society, governed by fixed laws, or are they the result either of chance or of supernatural influence?"⁵⁹ Fiske was convinced that the cosmos oper-

⁵⁶ "Postscript on Mr. Buckle," *Writings*, XX, 202.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XX, 204-205. This was not quite fair to Buckle. The very point which Fiske had considered to be the core of Buckle's argument in 1861, namely, the consideration of moral and intellectual factors in social progress, was just such a "generalization," however loose and vague it may have been. Cf. *ibid.*, XX, 205 and "Mr. Buckle's Fallacies," *Writings*, XX, 144 ff.

⁵⁸ Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, I, 6. Cf. Fiske, "Mr. Buckle's Fallacies," *Writings*, XX, 136-137.

⁵⁹ Buckle, *op. cit.*, I, 6. Fiske, *op. cit.*, XX, 138-139.

ated according to laws. What he now needed was an adequate method for discovering and interpreting those laws and for orienting them to some all-inclusive principle which would explain both the phenomena of external nature and the internal, subjective aspects of man's history. Neither Humboldt nor Buckle answered this need satisfactorily. But by 1860 Fiske had found part of his answer in Auguste Comte's "Positive Philosophy" and was on the brink of discovering, in Herbert Spencer's writings, a law comprehensive enough to underlie "not only physics, but also history."⁶⁰

At the beginning of his acquaintance with Comte's work Fiske must have felt that Positivism provided the answer he sought. In the first place Comte had asserted that the "first characteristic of the Positive Philosophy is that it regards all phenomena as subjected to invariable natural Laws." The business of the philosopher was to "pursue an accurate discovery of these Laws, with a view to reducing them to the smallest possible number."⁶¹ Fiske found in this description of Positivism a double attraction: the suggestion that the phenomena of man's social and intellectual history could be treated as "scientifically" as the phenomena of nature were being treated, and the hint that there was the possibility of a systematic philosophy which would incorporate this scientific approach as its primary method of arriving at the truths about all phenomena. In the second place Comte had formulated a "fundamental law of human development"⁶² which would be the first step in the erection of such a systematic philosophy, and had arranged a "classification of the sciences" which outlined the procedure of investigation in such a way that "the most general

⁶⁰ Fiske, *op. cit.*, XX, 139.

⁶¹ Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau (New York and London, 1853), I, 5.

⁶² " . . . that each of our leading conceptions,—each branch of our knowledge,—passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive" (Comte, *The Positive Philosophy*, I, 1-2; cf. Fiske, "Comte's Positive Philosophy," *Writings*, XX, 129-130).

and least complex relations are studied prior to those which treat of relations more special and involved.”⁶³

Fiske accepted, rather enthusiastically, this “new method of research” which he found in Comte’s writings. But there were two points at which Positivism did not answer adequately his demands. The first of these was in connection with Comte’s assertion that “while pursuing the philosophic aim of all science, the lessening of the number of general laws requisite for the explanation of natural phenomena, we shall regard as presumptuous every attempt, in all future time, to reduce them rigorously to one.”⁶⁴ Comte’s emphasis fell, not on the unity of the laws, but on the “unity of method.” If one could employ a “unity of method,” he wrote, one need not be concerned about more than “homogeneousness of doctrine.”⁶⁵ Fiske liked this emphasis upon unity of method, but he also saw in this willingness to settle for “homogeneousness of doctrine” the “error of regarding philosophy merely as a logical Organon of the sciences.” This observation led him later to criticize Comte for failing to grasp the “conception of philosophy as a Universal Science in which the widest truths obtainable by the several sciences are contemplated together as corollaries of a single ultimate truth.”⁶⁶

Of more importance than this insistence upon one universal, fundamental law for the interpretation of all phenomena, however, was Fiske’s criticism of Comte’s interpretation of the theory of the relativity of knowledge.⁶⁷ Fiske held to what he later expressed as the “ineradicable belief in the absolute existence of Something which underlies and determines the series of changes

⁶³ Fiske, *op. cit.*, XX, 130, 132.

⁶⁴ Comte, *op. cit.*, I, 17.

⁶⁵ *Idem*.

⁶⁶ Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIV, 100.

⁶⁷ Fiske, “Comte’s Positive Philosophy,” *Writings*, XX, 128-129. Later, Fiske expressed the exact limits of his disagreement with Comte at this point: “our philosophy . . . , while it admits, to the fullest extent, the position that we can never know the Absolute Existence of which phenomena are the manifestations, it at the same time asserts that the doctrine of relativity cannot even be intelligibly expressed unless Absolute Existence is affirmed” (*Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 136).

which constitute our consciousness. . . . ”⁶⁸ Whatever the proofs which he was to advance later in defense of this belief, in 1860-1861 it had the character of an acceptance of an Existence for which Positivism could not provide. Fiske was careful to point out that Comte “ever implicitly recognizes the existence of noumena, while insisting upon their eternal banishment to the realm of the Unknowable.”⁶⁹ But he was equally careful and doubly insistent upon pointing out that Comte’s rejection of the “methods of subjective psychology” left him destitute of means by which to establish this doctrine of the relativity of knowledge.⁷⁰

There is no ground for supposing that Comte ever thoroughly understood *why* we cannot know the Absolute and the Infinite. He knew, as a matter of historical fact, that all attempts to obtain such knowledge had miserably failed, or ended in nothing better than vain verbal wranglings; but his ignorance of psychology was so great that he probably never knew, or cared to know, why it must necessarily be so.⁷¹

This failure in Comte’s system Fiske saw to have the inevitable outcome of an “unqualified assertion of materialism,” whether Comte himself would draw the inference or not.⁷² Thus, while he agreed with Comte’s skepticism about metaphysics, he felt that Comte “did not clearly distinguish between the rashness of metaphysics and the well-founded boldness of science.” Comte’s “neglect of psychological analysis” had led him to the inevitable confounding of “purely metaphysical hypotheses with those which are only premature but are nevertheless scientific,” and to the subsequent denial of the latter.⁷³ Fiske’s disagreement with Comte at this point was what led him to insist in 1885 that

⁶⁸ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 127.

⁶⁹ Fiske, “Comte’s Positive Philosophy,” *Writings*, XX, 128.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XX, 127, 129. “According to Comte there can be no science, worthy of the name, founded upon the observation and comparison of states of consciousness; and psychology must therefore be studied as a part of biology, by the aid solely of the methods used in biology. That is, the study of mind must be reduced to the study of nervous phenomena simply. . . . Having condemned psychological analysis as useless, Comte offers us in exchange the ludicrous substitute—Phrenology!” (*Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XV, 106-107).

⁷¹ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIV, 94-95.

⁷² *Ibid.*, XV, 107.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, XIV, 94-95.

he had never been a positivist.⁷⁴ The fact which he sensed as he looked back upon those early years was that even then there was present a confidence in the intuitive ability of man which prevented his being content with a theory of knowledge which did not make some place for the intuitions. That confidence, or faith, had roots deeper than Positivism could reach, and while it accounted in part for the search which led him to an early acceptance of Positivism, it also formed part of the reason why he rejected so quickly certain aspects of that philosophy.

While he was exploring Positivism Fiske found the suggestion of the next step to be taken in constructing a "cosmic philosophy." In 1860 he was reading Lewes's book on Comte. A passing reference in that work to Spencer's *Social Statics* interested him, and he secured a copy of the book and another by the same author (*The Principles of Psychology*). Upon learning that still another volume (*First Principles*) was about to appear in print as part of a whole new system of philosophy, he placed his name on the subscription list.⁷⁵ It was in this last work that he found the suggestions which were to make obvious to him the shortcomings in Comte's philosophy and the outline of a new system of philosophy which gave promise of answering the two basic weaknesses which made him dissatisfied with Positivism. In the early part of 1860 Spencer had made known the prospectus of his system of philosophy. The general aim, he said, would be "to bring the vast resources of modern science to bear upon the construction of a complete philosophical scheme that shall embrace the great departments of Life, of Mind, and of Society"⁷⁶ This was the aim which he set out to accomplish in *First Principles*.

⁷⁴ "Mr. Buckle's Fallacies," *Writings*, XX, 136 n. 1.

⁷⁵ See his letter to Spencer (Feb., 1864) (Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 294). The reference in Lewes's book was to Spencer's theory of the "tendency to individuation" among the higher forms of organic life: (G. H. Lewes, *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences: Being an Exposition of the Cours de Philosophie Positive of Auguste Comte* (London, 1890 [first published in 1853]), pp. 169-171; Spencer, *Social Statics; or, the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of Them Developed* (New York, 1883 [first published in 1850]), pp. 479-481.

⁷⁶ Spencer, *Social Statics*, introductory notice, p. v.

In it Fiske found two ideas which spoke directly to his own intellectual needs. There was, first of all, the statement of a "law of evolution," a unitary principle by which Spencer believed every phenomenal change in the areas of physics, psychology, sociology, etc. could be interpreted. Fiske saw in this the answer to Comte's assertion that "homogeneousness of doctrine" was the most that the philosopher might hope to accomplish. Every aspect of human life and knowledge could now be considered as corollaries of the one basic theory that every change takes place according to certain specified principles. In the second place, Fiske found in the opening sections of *First Principles* (which Spencer entitled "The Unknowable") the insistence that there need be no conflict between science and religion. Both disciplines, said Spencer, employ certain "ultimate ideas" which lie beyond the realm of true knowledge. The recognition of these ultimates and the acceptance of them within the framework of a theory of the relativity of knowledge would open the door to the reconciliation of science and religion. It was only in his later works that Fiske came to place major stress upon this second value, but there can be little doubt that part of the satisfaction which he found in reading Spencer can be attributed to this suggestion that religious beliefs and scientific theories were not essentially antagonistic. Of more immediate concern to Fiske, however, was the second part of Spencer's book—the sections in which he had set forth his development of the "law of evolution."

In May, 1864, Fiske received a copy of Spencer's essay on the "Classification of the Sciences" from the author himself.⁷⁷ In this essay Spencer pointed out his disagreement with Comte and provided a short sketch of the development of his own thought.

... The truth which Harvey's embryological inquiries first dimly indicated, which was more clearly perceived by Wolff and Goethe, and which was put into a definite shape by Von Baer—the truth that all organic de-

⁷⁷ *Letters*, p. 125.

velopment is a change from a state of homogeneity to a state of heterogeneity—this it is from which very many of the conclusions which I now hold, have indirectly resulted. . . . Falling amid beliefs in evolution of various orders, everywhere determined by natural causes, . . . the formula of Von Baer acted as an organizing principle. . . . Afterwards, there came the recognition of the need for further limitation of this formula; next the inquiry into those general laws of force from which this universal transformation necessarily results; next the deduction of these from the ultimate law of the persistence of force; next the perception that there is everywhere a process of Dissolution complementary to that of Evolution; and, finally, the determination of the conditions under which Evolution and Dissolution respectively occur.⁷⁸

This process led Spencer to the formulation of his “law of evolution.”⁷⁹ The purpose of the second part of *First Principles* was to establish this law, first inductively and then deductively. Inductively, Spencer found that the principle of change from homogeneity to heterogeneity was exhibited in society, in geological disclosures, and in the astronomical systems, as well as in the “organic sciences.”⁸⁰ But these observations revealed other parallel changes which necessitated a narrowing of the law.

We saw that simultaneously with the change from homogeneity to heterogeneity, there takes place a change from indefiniteness of arrangement to definiteness of arrangement. . . . Further consideration made it apparent, that the increasing definiteness . . . necessarily results from increasing integration of the parts severally rendered unlike.⁸¹

The next step was to establish that “this progressive change in the arrangement of Matter, is accompanied by a parallel change

⁷⁸ Spencer, “The Classification of the Sciences: with Reasons for Dissenting from the Philosophy of M. Comte,” quoted in *Social Statics*, introductory notice, pp. vii-viii.

⁷⁹ “Evolution is a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; through continuous differentiations and integrations” (Spencer, *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy*, 1st American ed.; New York, 1865, p. 216. Stated in terms of matter and motion, the law becomes: “Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation” (*First Principles*, 4th American ed.; New York, 1896, p. 407).

⁸⁰ *First Principles* (1st American ed.), pp. 488-489.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

in the arrangement of Motion. . . .” This meant that every increase in the structural complexity of things was paralleled by an increase in functional complexity. The general process of things, therefore, is from “a confused simplicity to an orderly complexity, in the distribution of both Matter and Motion.” Further observation revealed that this “species of transformation” has a limit. “Those aggregates which exhibit the entire change from uniformity to multiformity of structure and function, in comparatively short periods, eventually show us a reverse set of changes: Evolution is followed by Dissolution.”⁸² Disintegration and assimilation, of both parts and movements, set in. One or the other of these processes is found to be universally present. “There is in all cases going on that ever-complicating distribution of Matter and Motion which we call Evolution; save in those cases where it has been brought to a close and reversed by what we call Dissolution.”⁸³ Spencer’s concern was to state the laws according to which this “omnipresent metamorphosis” took place. He began this statement by pointing out that since all such changes consist in motions of matter produced by force, the interpretation of the process must be in terms of “certain ultimate laws of Matter, Motion, and Force.”⁸⁴

Before these laws could be established, however, Spencer now saw that it was necessary to define Matter, Motion, and Force, and to establish a basic law in relation to which these other general laws could be seen as corollaries. He defined Matter in terms of “co-existent positions that offer resistance; as contrasted with our conception of Space, in which the co-existent positions offer no resistance.” Of the two “ultimate elements” of Matter (extension and resistance) the latter, therefore, is

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 489-490.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

⁸⁴ *Idem*. “It is impossible to account for a certain change in the arrangement of the parts of any mass, without involving—first, the *matter* which makes up the parts thus re-arranged; next, the *motion* exhibited during the re-arrangement; and then, the *force* producing this motion. The problem is a dynamical one; and there can be no truly scientific solution of it, save one given in terms of Matter, Motion, and Force . . .” (*ibid.*, pp. 221-222).

really primary. Resistance is the characteristic of extended substance which really distinguishes it from Space. It followed from this establishment of the "resistance-attribute" as primary that the "experience of force" really underlies our concept of Matter; hence, "forces, standing in certain correlations, form the whole content of our idea of Matter."⁸⁵ Spencer's definition of Motion was accomplished by analyzing the concept of Motion itself and noting that its three "constituent elements" (Matter, Space, and Time) were to be interpreted in terms of force. Matter is that which moves, or resists; Space is the series of positions which Matter occupies in succession; Time is the description of the uniting in thought of a group of co-existent positions with successive ones. Since Motion was the "synthesis of such experiences" it, too, was derivative of the experience of Force.⁸⁶

Force, therefore, is the "ultimate of ultimates." This experience, from which all other modes of consciousness are derived, is itself not derivable from anything else; it is the "ultimate datum of consciousness," that of which change is the manifestation. It is this, therefore, which gives a clue to the basic law.⁸⁷ The formulation of the law itself depended upon a further examination of two propositions concerning Matter and Motion: that "matter is indestructible" and that "motion is continuous." Spencer defended the former of these propositions, first on inductive grounds, and then by pointing out the impossibility of conceiving of Matter as becoming nonexistent.

Thought consists in the establishment of relations. There can be no relation established, and therefore no thought framed, when one of the related terms is absent from consciousness. Hence it is impossible to think of something becoming nothing, for the same reason that it is impossible to think of nothing becoming something—the reason, namely, that nothing cannot become an object of consciousness.⁸⁸

The unthinkableness of the annihilation of Matter leads to the establishment of the assertion of its indestructibility. But

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.
⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234.
⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

what does this mean in terms of Force? Just as we become conscious of the existence of Matter through the resistance which it offers, so we become conscious of the permanence of Matter through the permanence of this resistance. Thus the "indestructibility of Matter" really means "that the *force* which a given quantity of Matter exercises, remains the same"; or, to phrase it differently, "the indestructibility of the *force* with which Matter affects us."⁸⁹

The second proposition ("Motion is continuous") was dealt with in much the same way. The very possibility of an exact science or philosophy rested upon the acceptance of the proposition. If it were considered possible for Motion to appear and vanish at random, no conclusions of science could be reached.⁹⁰ But Motion is only an inference of forces.

That which defies suppression in thought, is really the force which the motion indicates. The unceasing change of position, considered in itself, may be mentally abolished with difficulty. We can readily imagine retardation and stoppage to result from the action of external bodies. But to imagine this, is not possible without an abstraction of the force implied by the motion. We are obliged to conceive this force as impressed in the shape of re-action on the bodies that cause the arrest. . . . We can mentally diminish the velocity or space-element of motion, by diffusing the momentum or force-element over a larger mass of matter; but the quantity of this force-element, which we regard as the cause of motion, is unchangeable in thought.⁹¹

These two propositions, therefore, were seen to be simply special cases of a more inclusive law, the "Persistence of Force." Matter is a "space-occupying kind of Force"; Motion is a "change-working kind of Force," or "Energy."⁹² It was upon the basis of this ultimate law, said Spencer, that "any possible system of positive knowledge" must be built. Having established the fundamental law, he then proceeded to the discussion of the corollaries of the law. These would form the ultimate phil-

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 243 ff.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-248.

⁹² *Ibid.* (4th American ed.), p. 195.

osophic laws according to which all classes of objects in the universe were to be interpreted.

The first of these ultimate laws which he considered was the principle of "the correlation and equivalence of forces."⁹³ This principle was intended as a generalization on the results of observations of cases where "forces had apparently ended in nothing." In each case, said Spencer, "instrumental observation proved that effects had . . . been produced."⁹⁴ Thus, when any specific manifestation of force appeared to terminate, it did not really cease to exist, but was only "transformed into some other specific manifestation." This was found to be true, not only in inorganic changes, but also in the changes in organic life and society: "We are obliged to conclude that within this category, come the vital phenomena classed as mental, as well as those classed as physical. And it appeared inevitably to follow that of social changes, too, the like must be said."⁹⁵ The second general law which had been inductively established, according to Spencer, was that "all Motion must occur in the direction of least resistance, or in the direction of greatest traction, or in the direction of their resultant." Again, Spencer claimed that this law held not only for the inorganic world, but that it underlay the "structural and functional changes of organisms" and the "movements, temporary and permanent, that go on in society."⁹⁶ The third general law was that of the "rhythm of motion," a principle designed to be descriptive of the actions of phenomena ranging from the simple undulations of a flag in a breeze, through the "double, triple, and even quadruple rhythms" observable in tides and sound waves, to the patterns evident in the life-cycles of plants and animals, in the "mental and emotional undulations" in humans, and in the external and internal changes

⁹³ *Ibid.* (1st American ed.), Part II, chap. ix. In the second edition Spencer changed the wording of this principle to "the Transformation and Equivalence of Forces." See *First Principles* (4th American ed.), preface to the second edition, p. xiv. Fiske refers to the law simply as "Correlation of Forces," *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIV, 153.

⁹⁴ *First Principles* (1st American ed.), p. 259.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

⁹⁶ *Idem.*

of society.⁹⁷ Empirical observation of these phenomena led to the statement of the law as: "rhythm results wherever there is a conflict of forces not in equilibrium." Except in a case of complete balance of forces (where the state would be one of absolute rest), a pattern of rhythm was the only alternative.⁹⁸

These laws, then, were taken to be descriptive of the changes in phenomena which Spencer had expressed in his formula of evolution. The next step was to establish the principle deductively, that is, to prove that it was a necessary derivation from the law of the "Persistence of Force." In order to accomplish this he established four general principles which were to be deduced from the basic law.

The first principle was stated as the "Instability of the Homogeneous." This was based upon the observation that, since the parts of any homogeneous aggregation are exposed to forces that differ in kind or amount, the parts will be of necessity differently modified. "The relations of outside and inside, and of comparative nearness to neighboring sources of influence, imply the reception of influences that are unlike in quantity and quality, or both; and it follows that unlike changes will be produced in the parts thus dissimilarly acted upon."⁹⁹ The movement of change, therefore, will be from the more homogeneous to the less homogeneous, an inevitable tendency to increasing heterogeneity. This same process is accentuated by a second cause of increasing complexity: the "Multiplication of Effects." Since action and reaction are equal and opposite, "it follows that in differentiating the parts on which it falls in unlike ways, the

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Part II, chap. xi, pp. 313-332.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318. An important corollary to this law was Spencer's insistence that rhythm did not mean circularity. ". . . this action and reaction of forces never brings about a complete return to a previous state." This is even more certain where the rhythm is complex and the units involved are "partially independent"; in such cases "we see nothing more than a general oscillation." This means that at the end of any periodic movement, there is an observable difference between the state arrived at and the state departed from. The degree of this difference "is usually marked in proportion as the influences at work are numerous."

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

incident force must itself be correspondingly differentiated.”¹⁰⁰ A uniform force is thus reduced to a multiform force, which becomes, in turn, the cause of a secondary increase of multiformity in the body which reacted. The process continues with increasing effects and the more the heterogeneity increases, the more effective and potent becomes this secondary cause of change.¹⁰¹ Once heterogeneity has set in, however, another process becomes operative: “Segregation” (or “Integration”). A demarcated grouping replaces a vague one. Among the multiform parts there will be some similar and some dissimilar. External incident forces will act similarly on similar parts and differently on different parts. Thus, “those of the same order will be moved in the same way, and in a way that differs from that in which units of other orders are moved. . . .”¹⁰² The result will be an integration of the like and segregation of the like from the unlike. The fourth deduction sets the limits of the process. Spencer did not believe in evolution as an infinite process. Evolution has an “impassable limit,” tending, finally, toward “Equibration.”

That universal co-existence of antagonist forces which . . . necessitates the universality of rhythm, and which . . . necessitates the decomposition of every force into divergent forces, at the same time necessitates the ultimate establishment of a balance. Every motion being motion under resistance is continually suffering deductions; and these unceasing deductions finally result in the cessation of motion.¹⁰³

As long as there is a residual force in any direction the state of equilibrium cannot exist. The condition necessary for this to occur, therefore, is “the formation of as many specializations and combinations of parts, as there are specialized and combined forces to be met.”¹⁰⁴ Until this condition is reached, the persistence of force “manifested in Time and Space, under the forms of Matter and Motion,” will necessitate the continuance of the transformations of evolution.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 419-420.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 497.

Spencer concluded this volume of the presentation and defense of the law of evolution as derived from the principle of the "Persistence of Force" with the conviction that he had stated the basic principle according to which all phenomena were to be interpreted:

If these conclusions be accepted—if it be admitted that they inevitably follow from the truth transcending all others in authority—if it be agreed that the phenomena going on everywhere are parts of the general process of Evolution, save where they are parts of the reverse process of Dissolution; then it must be inferred that all phenomena received their complete interpretation, only when recognized as parts of these processes.¹⁰⁶

Here, then, was a basis of interpretation which claimed to be established upon a unified principle. All phenomena are incidents in the redistribution of Matter and Motion. These redistributions conform to certain principles which are deducible from the principle of the "Persistence of Force." Upon this principle a "Synthetic Philosophy" could be built. In the light of this work Fiske saw the inadequacy of the "materialism" of Humboldt and the superficiality of the generalizations of Buckle. It was here that he found what he believed Comte lacked: "the conception of philosophy as a Universal Science in which the widest truths obtainable by the several sciences are contemplated together as corollaries of a single ultimate truth."¹⁰⁷

Fiske's acceptance of Spencer's theory is evident in the articles which he wrote immediately following his reading of *First Principles*.¹⁰⁸ In his article on the "Evolution of Language," he began with the observation that the "science of language" in his day was still presented as an "empirical science."

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 499.

¹⁰⁷ Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIV, 100.

¹⁰⁸ These articles are as follows: two works on language, "The Evolution of Language," in 1863, followed by a sequel in 1869 on "The Genesis of Language"; two works on the sociological development of man, "Problems in Language and Mythology," in 1865, followed by "The Conflict of Reason with Bigotry and Superstition," in 1866; and two articles on education, "University Reform," in 1866, and "Liberal Education," in 1868. Two other important articles on the "Laws of History" were written during this period (1868-1869). These last two are discussed in detail in chap. iii, pp. 103-106.

It is empirical in the qualified sense in which chemistry is empirical, as having hitherto discovered no ultimate law from which the genesis of its phenomena may be explained. Though the philologist at present compares, analyzes, and classifies the facts before him, he is unable to affiliate those facts upon any primordial principle.¹⁰⁹

The need for such a "fundamental law" he thought was obvious. It was his intention, therefore, "to show how the growth of human speech has conformed throughout to a fixed and regular law of evolution"; to exhibit language, "not as a material product, but as an organic growth, conforming to a definite law of development, and determined by conditions partly physical and partly social."¹¹⁰ His argument started with an acceptance of the conclusion of Professor Max Müller, that "the two fundamental elements of speech are *roots predicative* and *roots demonstrative*."¹¹¹ He then pointed out that this conclusion coincided with the general analysis of knowledge presented by Spencer: that "the ultimate elements of all knowledge are Space, Time, Matter, Motion and Force; of which the first four may be interpreted in terms of the last."¹¹² Language, therefore, should be interpretable under the Spencerian law of evolution. The remainder of the essay was devoted to the substantiation of this claim, to show that language develops from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous with corollary developments from simplicity to complexity, indefiniteness to definiteness, etc. As to the origin of language, Fiske held that while a common origin was suggested, this fact did not warrant the inference "that there was ever a time

¹⁰⁹ Fiske, "The Evolution of Language," *North American Review*, XCVII (Oct., 1863), 413.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XCVII, 414, 417.

¹¹¹ "Predicative roots denote either existences or actions; demonstrative roots mark the position of locality of actions and existences" (*ibid.*, XCVII, 421) Fiske had reference to Müller's *Lectures on the Science of Language, delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, in April, May, and June, 1861* (London, 1861; New York, 1862).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, XCVII, 422. "Since the expression of our knowledge must come under the same law as our knowledge itself, it follows that language must have an element to express Matter and Motion, which are the *contents* of mental relations; and likewise an element to express the *forms* of mental relations, which are Space and Time. These requirements are fulfilled respectively by predicative and demonstrative roots . . . (*ibid.*, XCVII, 422-423).

when the thoughts of men were exchanged through the medium of a single vocabulary." What was suggested was the "original homogeneity of language," not the "original unity." The one impressive conclusion derived from an analysis of language was that for "all primitive languages there can be but one kind of grammatical structure."¹¹³

Fiske continued the discussion of this latter point in the second of his two articles on language, "The Genesis of Language." Having determined what he considered the original character of language to be and having pointed out that the law of evolution governed its development, he proposed "to sketch the primitive shape and structure of human speech, and to examine, as far as our scientific resources will permit, the further question as to how these primitive elements originated."¹¹⁴

The second group of essays was concerned with the evolutionary interpretation of the sociological development of man. The first essay, "Problems in Language and Mythology," was really a review of the second series of Max Müller's lectures before the Royal Institution in 1862. Fiske was interested primarily in exploring the possibilities of using the new knowledge of philology in the explanation of myths. Müller's thesis was that myths have a physical origin, and Fiske accepted this conclusion. The proof of the thesis, he said, awaited the discovery of the vedas of ancient India. These writings provided the material needed for a comparative study of Greek and Indian mythology, and, what was of more importance, contained an expression of "mythic phraseology . . . in a far more rudimentary and intelligible condition" than we find in Greek mythology.¹¹⁵ From the Vedas, with the help of comparative philology, the true meanings of ancient myths

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, XCVII, 447. Fiske found this "original grammatical structure" where "all the elements of speech, whether predicative roots or roots demonstrative, had once their several independent meanings," best exemplified in the Chinese language.

¹¹⁴ "The Genesis of Language," *North American Review*, CIX (Oct., 1869), 310.

¹¹⁵ "Problems in Language and Mythology," *Christian Examiner*, LXXVIII, Fifth Series, XVI (May, 1865), 380.

could thus be deciphered. The key to the interpretation was the observation that "The divinities of the Vedas almost always appear as personifications of the great phenomena of nature; and this character is also implied in their names."¹¹⁶ Fiske believed that this analysis would be found to be true of all ancient myths, and insisted that from this point the approach to interpreting myths should be made.

. . . with increasing refinement the work of personification became more complete, moral attributes were grouped about the mythic personages, and a differentiation arose between them and the physical phenomena which they had once represented, but which were now classed apart under the dominion of law. Thus the myths of antiquity grew from the shape in which we find them in the "Rig-Veda" into the shape in which they are found in the epics of Valmiki and Homer. Zeus, Herakles, and Apollo, no longer thought of as vivified natural forces, but endowed with thought, feeling, and intelligent action became the *dramatis personae* of Euripides and Aeschylus.

Fiske carried this interpretation of the development of mythology into the broader fields of sociological study in the article, "The Conflict of Reason with Bigotry and Superstition." The essay took the form of a critical review of W. E. H. Lecky's two volumes on the *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (New York, 1866). The article began with a short synopsis of Lecky's more extensive survey of the decline and virtual disappearance of the belief in witchcraft. The significance of this study, said Fiske, was to be found in the wider implications of the process which led to the discrediting of this belief.

So great a change cannot but be symptomatic of an alteration equally great in our habits of contemplating phenomena in general. It is obviously a special phase of that steadily increasing tendency to refer events to natural instead of supernatural causes, which is vaguely designated as Rationalism.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

¹¹⁸ "The Conflict of Reason with Bigotry and Superstition," *Christian Examiner*, LXXXI, New Series, II (Sept., 1866), 173. Fiske disagreed with Lecky in assigning the basic cause of the destruction of belief in witchcraft, however. Lecky found the chief cause in the "influence exerted [in France] by the writings of

Lecky also found in "Rationalism" the cause of the decline in bigotry and persecution. This conclusion was based upon the argument that persecution results from the conviction of the persecutors in the absolute validity of their assumed position.¹¹⁹ Rationalism evidenced the fallacies in such a position by pointing out the dangers in asserting our own omniscience and by showing that "even error vigorously defended is likely to be of as much service as truth torpidly acquiesced in."¹²⁰ Fiske would not accept this latter conclusion *in toto*. He was willing to admit that "the disappearance of the belief in witchcraft is due to the progress of scientific knowledge." On the other hand, however, he insisted that Lecky had oversimplified the matter with reference to persecution itself. Here, he said, the decline has been "mainly owing to increasing moral refinement."¹²¹

One of Fiske's minor criticisms of Lecky is valuable in clarifying the state of Fiske's own thinking at this time in relation to the problem of religion and science. He praised Lecky for the "admirable impartiality" with which he treated those with whom he disagreed, but suggested that the eclectic position which Lecky had adopted in treating most matters was neither successful nor satisfactory. For an example he cited Lecky's refusal to follow to its logical end either the position of "materialism" or that of "spiritualism." He then went on to make a statement which clearly reflects the fact that, for him, science and religion could be brought together, each rendering service to the other.

Bayle, Descartes, and Voltaire; in England, the speculations of Hobbes, the Baconian philosophy, and the reaction against Puritanism after the Restoration." Fiske, while agreeing that these were influential, insisted that there was a more general cause: "We allude to the progress of physical science, which, by constantly exhibiting wider and wider groups of phenomena in their relations of co-existence and sequence, has done more than any thing else to check the primitive tendency of the mind to attribute unusual events to the interposition of capricious, inscrutable, and therefore terrible, agencies" (*ibid.*, p. 175-176).

¹¹⁹ Thus persecution in the Christian Church arises where there is a belief in the "dogma of exclusive salvation" (*ibid.*, p. 189).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196. We shall notice that this criticism is substantially the same as that which Fiske made of Buckle's assertion that "the intellectual element in our nature is advancing, while the moral element is not. . . ." See below, chap. iii, pp. 98-100.

The results obtained from the study of man's spiritual and material nature are destined ultimately to coincide. Such a harmony is, however, not to be realized by an eclecticism which shrinks from logically following out either of the opposing lines of thought, but by the fearlessness which pushes each to its inevitable conclusion. Only when this is done will materialism and spiritualism be seen to be equally important apart, and equally powerful when united. Only then will the long warfare between science and religion be exchanged for an enduring alliance. Only then will the two Knights of the fable finally throw down their weapons, on discovering that the causes for which they have so long been tilting are essentially identical,—are, in truth, one and the same eternal cause.¹²²

In the two articles on education, Fiske attempted to suggest what the proper role of science in contemporary education should be. In the essay on "University Reform" he defined the duty of the university as twofold: ". . . to teach the student how to think for himself, and then to give him the material to exercise his thought upon."¹²³ The order of these two duties was the significant point of Fiske's article. It was essential, he said, that the conviction of freedom of thought should precede concern over the validity of doctrines. With this basic principle established, Fiske suggested a reduction in required work and a concentration upon the "comprehension of method and general results." The purpose of these years was a training which would "enable the student to approach his own special subject in the light thrown upon it by widely different subjects, and with the varied mental discipline which no single study is competent to furnish."¹²⁴ Back of this, Fiske admitted, was the conviction that "Nature is not a mere juxtaposition of parts, but a complex organic whole. . . ." It was, therefore, essential, first to see the whole; the parts would then be intelligently interpreted. Doctrine would follow method;

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹²³ "University Reform," *Writings*, XX, 276. His more complete statement was: ". . . first, in stimulating the mental faculties of each student to varied and harmonious activity,—in supplying every available instrument for sharpening the perceptive powers, strengthening the judgment, and adding precision and accuracy to the imagination; secondly, in providing for all those students who desire it the means of acquiring a thorough elementary knowledge of any given branch of science, art, or literature" (*idem*).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, XX, 297-298.

the investigation of the materials should follow the acquisition of "the instruments of investigation."¹²⁵

The article on "Liberal Education" was an appraisal of the charge that "a large part of the classical instruction now given in English universities is utterly worthless, and ought to be replaced by a course in physical science. . . ."¹²⁶ Fiske disagreed with this opinion, arguing that while a reform was certainly needed, it should consist "not in the substitution of one branch of studies for another so much as in the more liberal, rational, and intelligent pursuit of various branches." An adequate approach was the crux of the problem and such an approach, consisting of "fairness of mind, accuracy of judgment, and shrewdness of perception," was limited to no one class of studies.¹²⁷ Fiske deplored the contemporary attitude which disparaged classical studies as "unfit for the needs of our time." Utilitarianism, he argued, was not an adequate principle by which to determine what should or should not be taught. The defense of the study of science, therefore, was not to be based on an assumption that it had greater utility than classical studies. The claim of science was based upon "considerations of general culture." "The legitimate claim which science makes is that, while drawing the mind toward investigation and activity for its own sake, it confers upon humanity unlooked-for rewards."¹²⁸ The real answer to inadequate education was not a change in materials, but in methods. . . . in order that either a literary or a scientific education shall produce worthy results, it must be rationally conducted, with a single eye to the greatest possible perfection of culture. Nothing will be gained by giving up Greek composition, and studying botany or chemistry as a mere collection of "useful" details. . . . It is not by throwing overboard a valuable portion of the cargo, but by adopting improved methods of navigating the ship, that we shall make a successful voyage.¹²⁹

These articles, written between 1863 and 1869, were primarily

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, XX, 298, 300.

¹²⁶ "Liberal Education," *Writings*, XX, 243-244.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, XX, 248.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, XX, 268-270.

concerned with the problem of methodology and the application of what Fiske believed to be the true "scientific method" to the study of language, education, and sociology. But this almost total concern with method, which gives a definitely positivistic tone to Fiske's writings of this period, cannot be explained simply by assuming that he had ceased to be interested in metaphysical problems. It cannot be denied that he subordinated consideration of such problems to the development of what he felt to be a surer avenue to truth. But when he criticized Comte for confusing "premature scientific hypotheses" with those which are "purely metaphysical," he seemed to be suggesting that the knowledge available to man had greater extent than Positivism was willing to admit. From his reading of Spencer, Fiske had found something more, therefore, than just a "law of evolution." There were present in Spencer's philosophy discussions of ideas which, while Fiske himself would call them "scientific," would, by Comte's definition, belong to the sphere of metaphysics. These ideas were contained, for the most part, in the first section of *First Principles*, where Spencer had stated his purpose as the attempt to find the "truth in which Religion and Science coalesce."¹³⁰

Spencer began by examining the three types of hypotheses concerning the origin of the world which were to be found among religious thinkers: that the world is self-existent; that it is self-created; or that it is created by an external agency. All of these hypotheses, he observed, had a common basis. They all agreed "in the tacit conviction that the existence of the world with all that it contains and all which surrounds it, is a mystery ever pressing for interpretation." As far as religion was concerned, therefore, any reconciliation with science would have to be made on the basis of the recognition that "the Power which the Universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable."¹³¹ Spencer then considered the ultimate ideas of science: Space, Time, Matter,

¹³⁰ Spencer, *First Principles* (1st American ed.), pp. 20 ff.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 44-46.

Motion, and Force. These too, he found, were representative of "realities that cannot be comprehended." The scientist, even more than the man of religion, "truly knows that in its ultimate essence nothing can be known."¹³² This, then, was the common basis upon which reconciliation could be effected: "Ultimate religious ideas and ultimate scientific ideas, alike turn out to be merely symbols of the actual, not cognitions of it."¹³³ All our knowledge is relative. But this, said Spencer, necessarily involves the assertion that a nonrelative exists. ". . . from the very necessity of thinking in relations, it follows that the Relative is itself inconceivable, except as related to a real Non-relative. . . . Unless a real Non-relative or Absolute be postulated, the Relative itself becomes Absolute. . . ."¹³⁴ Both science and religion agree in recognizing the existence of an unknowable First Cause of the universe and its phenomena. Their position is valid; they err only when they attempt to define this Unknowable.

Spencer referred to this theory of the Unknowable in two other places in his philosophical works. In his *Principles of Sociology*, in the section on "Ecclesiastical Institutions," he sought to interpret the "ultimate form of religion" in terms of the Unknowable. The transition from dogmatic theism to agnosticism, which he felt was to be observed in religious history, would probably continue into the future. But this did not mean that "all observances tending to keep alive a consciousness of the relation in which we stand to the Unknown Cause" would cease to exist. There would always be a place for a "due sense of Mystery in which the origin and meaning of the Universe are shrouded."¹³⁵ While the developing analysis of knowledge would continue to force man into agnosticism, it would also continue to urge him to "imagine some solution to the Great Enigma which he knows cannot be solved." Eventually, therefore, re-

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

¹³⁵ *The Principles of Sociology* (authorized ed.; New York, 1897), Vol. II, part ii, 825.

ligion would be reduced to a contemplation of this Ultimate Reality which is at the same time the Ultimate Mystery.¹³⁶

The second place where Spencer applied the theory was in his establishment of the position of "Transfigured Realism" in *The Principles of Psychology*. This "realism," he said, was one which simply asserted objective existence as separate from, and independent of, subjective existence.

While *some* objective existence, manifested under *some* conditions, remains as the final necessity of thought, there does not remain the implication that this existence and these conditions are more to us than the unknown correlatives of our feelings and the relations among our feelings. . . . it [Transfigured Realism] affirms neither that any one mode of this objective existence is in reality that which it seems, nor that the connexions among its modes are objectively what they seem.¹³⁷

The object as is cannot be known to us. ". . . Subject and Object, as actually existing, can never be contained in the consciousness produced by the co-operation of the two." Yet, they are "necessarily implied" by that consciousness. There must be predicated an Unknowable Reality which lies behind all existence as it appears to us. Behind all manifestations, "inner and outer," there is a Power manifested. The nature of this Power cannot be known; we "lack the faculty of framing even the dimmest conception of it." Nonetheless, its presence must be posited as "the absolute fact without which there can be no relative facts." Back of the constantly changing objects of this world and the transitory feelings and thoughts of men, "the one thing permanent is the Unknowable Reality hidden under all these changing shapes."¹³⁸

In the "Prologomena" to the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* Fiske relied heavily upon these arguments of Spencer. It is significant that while Spencer devoted less than one-fourth of his introductory volumes to these questions, which are really con-

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, ii, 843.

¹³⁷ *The Principles of Psychology* (authorized ed.; New York, 1896), Vol. II, part ii, 494.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, ii, 499, 503.

cerned with the attitude toward metaphysics, Fiske devoted nearly one-half of the whole *Cosmic Philosophy* to them. This fact alone suggests that his interest in the Spencerian philosophy extended beyond the mere application of a general law of evolution to physical, historical, and social phenomena. The limitation of philosophy to the study of phenomena which are to be considered, not as "objective realities," but as "effects produced upon our consciousness," served well as a basis for science. But what of the persistent problem of the correlation of the subjective order of our conceptions to the objective order of things? Traditionally, said Fiske, there have been two answers given to this problem. One, Idealism, denied the existence of objective reality; the other, Positivism, asserted that the truth of the matter could never be attained. Neither of these alternatives was completely satisfactory to Fiske, and he thought that Spencer's "Transfigured Realism" opened the door to a completely new answer. He was quite specific about the possibility of this answer. Both Idealism and Positivism, he said, had failed to see the real implications which the theory of the relativity of knowledge contained concerning objective reality. Idealism, by asserting that the "unknowable objective reality is a mere figment of the imagination," actually violated the doctrine of the relativity of knowledge by "assuming that the possibilities of our thinking are to be taken as the measure of the possibilities of existence." Positivism, recognizing that such an assumption was illegitimate, sought to escape by ignoring the question altogether. It neither affirmed nor denied the existence of objective reality.¹³⁹ Idealism and Positivism, then, had this in common: neither would take a positive attitude toward objective existence, and it was just such an attitude that Fiske felt to be necessarily implied in the theory of the relativity of knowledge. It was against this common error that he sought to demonstrate his own position and that of Spencer, which affirmed the "objective existence of an Unknow-

¹³⁹ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 121.

able Reality, of which all phenomena whatever are the knowable manifestations.”¹⁴⁰ This affirmation, he believed, could be made from a position which he claimed to be scientific. Thus, while making its affirmation, it rejected “all ontological speculation, whether metaphysical or theological, concerning the nature of that which exists absolutely.” The proper attitude of the mind when it faces this Unknown Reality is “not a speculative, but an emotional attitude. It belongs, . . . not to Philosophy, but to Religion.”¹⁴¹ The implications of this conclusion, which Fiske thought was deducible from Spencer’s philosophy, finally led him beyond the position of “Transfigured Realism.” Philosophy was still to be interpreted as the study of the Cosmos; “a study of phenomena, not of noumena; of evolution, not of creation; of laws, not of purposes; of the How, not of the Why.”¹⁴² But this did not deny the existence of noumena, or of purpose, and it left the Unknown First Cause firmly established as the Reality of Realities, to whom man could respond with confidence. The implications of this response, while not properly “knowledge,” could tell much of the relation of man to this Ultimate Being. Cosmic Theism would become, not only a possibility, but a necessary corollary of Cosmic Philosophy.

These conclusions were all reached by Fiske prior to 1874, when the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* was published. In that work, in addition to interpreting Spencer’s philosophy, Fiske attempted to apply the basic principle of that philosophy to the interpretation of history and to the philosophy of religion. His acceptance of Spencer in this connection involved two factors. First, Spencer provided a system within which a more unitary interpretation of all social and historical phenomena could be made. Second, this same Spencerian system made possible, Fiske thought, a “Cosmic Theism” for which neither orthodox “ontologism” nor Comtean Positivism provided. Cosmic Philosophy offered to man a new principle of interpretation in which the ethical or

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII, 132-133.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, XIII, 64.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XIII, 141.

religious responses of man to the Unknowable Reality were given the dignity of valid responses, because the interpretation itself had all the validity of a truly "scientific" approach. It is true that in this early period Fiske gave the preponderance of his attention to the use of this principle of interpretation in reference to history and sociology. But he could not easily have done otherwise and remained a student of Comte and Spencer. When he abandoned the "benumbing assertions" of orthodox theology for the "scientific method," in order to find a more adequate approach to the interpretation of life, his attention was perforce drawn to those aspects of life which Comte and Spencer treated. But Fiske brought his optimistic view of man to his reading of those two philosophers. Within that view was a conviction about the implications of the moral development of man and the validity of man's responses to a Reality which was noumenal in character. His awareness and criticism of the materialistic implications in Positivism reflect this primary concern and bear witness to the fact that his acceptance of both Positivism and Spencerianism was only partial and, in the last analysis, secondary in importance.

Philip Wiener has written that, "There is no doubt that Fiske substituted the immutable laws of astronomical and biological evolution for the eternal verities of revealed religion, a transfer of faith which Comte's and Buckle's positivism failed to accomplish, to Fiske's optimistic mind, as effectively as Spencer's metaphysical system."¹⁴³ The truth in this observation is obscured by the failure to make clear that Fiske's "transfer of faith" took place within the realm of methodology.¹⁴⁴ He turned from Positivism because it could not provide him with an adequate avenue to the establishment of a conviction which he held intuitively. We shall see that when he went beyond Spencer

¹⁴³ Wiener, *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*, p. 137.

¹⁴⁴ Wiener seems to suggest this, however, when he writes that "what Fiske did, in order to save religious faith, was to transfer metaphysical *certainty* to the scientific law of evolution" (*ibid.*, p. 140). Such a transfer implies, not just "positivistic doubts about metaphysics," but also a conviction about the reality of the object of that certainty.

in his later works on religion, the movement was in the same direction and for the same reason—a continuing search for a philosophical system which would provide for the “scientific” establishment of convictions intuitively held.

III. THE COSMIC TEST OF TRUTH

Fiske agreed with the Transcendentalists in their emphasis upon the consciousness of man as the focal point from which to view the universe. But he was cautious not to let the emphasis upon the centrality of man's consciousness lead him into an acceptance of a completely “intuitive” theory of knowledge. He was certain that the truth of the cosmos, to the extent that such truth was possible for man, would be obtained through the exercise of the higher attributes which evolution had developed in man. These attributes were a part of the native capacity of the individual, and for the individual they operated in much the same manner as the “intuitions” of the Transcendentalists. And yet Fiske insisted that he did not hold to the theory of “innate ideas” or “intuitions” as such. We reject, he wrote, “equally with Locke, the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas, recognizing fully that there can be no knowledge until the mind has been awakened into activity by the presence of objects to be cognized.”¹⁴⁵ In a like manner he rejected the suggestion that the cosmic philosopher was “imitating those high *a priori* metaphysicians, who regard all their cherished traditional notions as infallible intuitions, because of their professed inability to disbelieve them.”¹⁴⁶ The test of truth for which he sought would have to be more “scientifically” grounded than a dogmatic appeal to the innate or intuitive idea permitted. This did not mean, however, the acceptance of a purely empirical theory of knowledge. In the first place, the acceptable test, as Fiske saw it, must not deny that truth might involve elements which lie beyond the scope of empirical demonstration. Empirical general-

¹⁴⁵ Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 66.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII, 88.

ization alone was insufficient as a philosophical test of truth applicable to all cosmic phenomena.¹⁴⁷ In the second place, Fiske was not suggesting that the adequate theory of knowledge was *either* intuitive *or* empirical; rather his whole emphasis was to show that it involved elements of *both* systems, each element applicable at a different level, the intuitive element, when the individual alone was considered, and the empirical element, when the evolutionary development of mankind was considered. He thought he had found in the Spencerian system a way to this reconciliation.

Fiske began his restatement of Spencer's test of truth with a provisional definition: "Truth may be provisionally defined as the exact correspondence between the subjective order of our conceptions and the objective order of the relations among things."¹⁴⁸ The doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, however, resting upon the analysis of the knowing process, showed that man cannot know the things-in-themselves. How is he then to ascertain the "objective order of the relations among things? Without this knowledge, comparison between the objective and subjective orders seems impossible, and an objective canon of truth beyond the reach of man. Fiske criticized Locke's theory that all knowledge is the result of experience. This theory, he said, implicitly denied the "necessary cooperation of subject and object in every act of knowledge."¹⁴⁹ In the process of knowledge, Fiske insisted, the subject was active—not just passive, as the Lockean epistemology seemed to suggest.

We therefore recognize as fully as Leibnitz, that the subject actively co-*operates* with the object in each act of consciousness. And we insist that, *for that very reason*, our knowledge, being the product of subjective and objective factors, can never be regarded as a knowledge of the objective factor by itself.¹⁵⁰

This doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, implicit, according to Fiske, in Leibniz's thought, although Leibniz him-

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 91; XV, 362.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII, 66, 67.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII, 65.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII, 67.

self failed to draw that conclusion,¹⁵¹ was taken up by both Hume and Kant. Fiske claimed that the Spencerian test of truth was a synthesis of the positions of these last two philosophers, of the "uniformity of experience" criterion of Hume and the "inconceivability test" of Kant.¹⁵² Hume's test, said Fiske, accepted as true that to which human experience had invariably testified. While this might not be true for the "pure objective order," it was true for us; that is, it was "true of the order of things as presented to our intelligence." Kant, on the other hand, distinguishing between "contingent truths" and "necessary truths," accepted the test of uniformity as a sufficient criterion of contingent truth, but not trustworthy as a test of necessary truth.¹⁵³ Necessity had to be furnished by the mind independently of experience.

Fiske noted two assertions in Kant's position, and his criticism of these assertions led him to the formulation of his own theory of knowledge. Implicitly, he said, Kant was asserting that the subjective element in the process of knowledge could be isolated from the objective element, "at least so far as to be independently defined." In refutation of this assertion Fiske quoted G. H. Lewes:

Psychology, if it can show us anything, can show the absolute impossibility of our discriminating the objective from the subjective elements. In the first place, the attempt would *only* be possible on the ground that we could, at any time and in any way, disengage Thought from its content; separate in Feeling the object as it is out of all relation to Sensibility, or the subject as pure subject. . . . Pure thought and pure matter are unknown quantities, to be reached by no equation. The thought is necessarily and universally subject-object,—matter is necessarily, and to us universally, object-subject. . . . Indeed, seeing that he [Kant] denied altogether the possibility of a knowledge of pure object, the *Ding an sich*, it was a violent strain

¹⁵¹ Leibniz "gave to his statement an interpretation quite inconsistent with the doctrine of the relativity of knowledge as we are now obliged to hold it. He held that in many acts of cognition, the mind contributes an element of certainty which could never have been gained from experience, which could never have flowed from the intercourse of the mind with its environment; and that propositions obtained by such acts of cognition are Necessary Truths,—truths which are true of the objective order of things as well as of the subjective order" (*ibid.*, XIII, 68).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, XIII, 71, 87.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, XIII, 71.

of logic to conclude that in thought he could separate this unknowable object from the subject knowing it.¹⁵⁴

Kant's assertion that the subject could of itself possess truth independent of experience opened the door, said Fiske, to the vagaries of later German idealism and the inference that "the possibilities of thought might be rendered co-extensive with the possibilities of things," the subject imposing its necessities upon the object.¹⁵⁵

Explicitly, said Fiske, Kant was asserting that absolute uniformity of experience was inadequate to produce in man the belief in the necessity of any given relation among phenomena.¹⁵⁶ The Kantian argued that since our limited experience cannot produce the belief, it must have origin independently of experience; that is, it must be "necessitated by the very constitution of our thinking minds." Our accumulated experience, therefore, could not produce the belief that the future must inevitably resemble the past.¹⁵⁷ Fiske disagreed and insisted that this very belief arose, not independently of experience, but actually because man was incapable of transcending his experience.¹⁵⁸ Again he turned to Lewes for his argument.

The irresistible tendency we have to anticipate that the future course of events will resemble the past is simply that we have experience *only* of the past, and as we cannot *transcend* our experience, we cannot conceive things really existing otherwise than as we have known them. The very fact of our being compelled to judge of the unknown by the known . . . —of our incapacity to believe that the same effects should not follow from the same causes—this very fact is a triumphant proof of our having no ideas *not* acquired through experience. If we had *a priori* ideas, these, as independent of, and superior to, all experience, would enable us to judge the unknown according to some *other* standard than that of the known. But no other standard is possible to us.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Lewes, *The History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte* (3rd ed.; London, 1867), II, 483-484; cf. Fiske, *Writings*, XIII, 73-74.

¹⁵⁵ Fiske, *Writings*, XIII, 75.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII, 72. That is, "uniformity of experience, however long continued, can never afford us a sufficient guaranty of necessary truth" (*ibid.*, XIII, 76).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 72, 79.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII, 82.

¹⁵⁹ Lewes, *op. cit.* (2nd ed.), p. 668. Quoted by Fiske, *Writings*, XIII, 83-84.

Since we cannot transcend our experience, Fiske continued, it follows that our conceptions are really the registry of our experience.

Our minds being that which intercourse with the environment—both their own intercourse and that of ancestral minds . . . —has made them, it follows that our indestructible beliefs must be the registry of that intercourse, must be necessarily true, not because they are independent of experience, but because they are the only complete unqualified expression of it.¹⁶⁰

The adequate canon of truth, therefore, should rest primarily upon the experience of man. It would include an element of uniformity, but uniformity must be supported by the element of inconceivability; that is, a belief cannot be true for us which is conceivably at variance with the registry of our experience. A belief is true for us if its negation is inconceivable on the basis of our uniform experience.¹⁶¹ Fiske stated this canon of truth in three propositions:

(1) "A necessary truth is one that is expressed in a proposition of which the negation is inconceivable, after all disturbing conditions have been eliminated."

(2) "A proposition of which the negation is inconceivable is necessarily true in relation to human intelligence."

(3) "This test of inconceivability is the only ultimate test of truth which philosophy can accept as valid."¹⁶²

Fiske's reference to this test as necessarily true in relation to human intelligence emphasized the fact that it was a test for "Relative Truth" only, not "Absolute Truth," since the latter would imply experience of the objective order in itself which man

¹⁶⁰ Fiske, *Writings*, XIII, 86-87.

¹⁶¹ Thus our experience is that "parallel lines" cannot enclose space and our conception of parallel lines is based upon the experience that such lines do not enclose space. In order to imagine parallel lines enclosing space, therefore, we must annihilate our concept of "parallel lines"; that is, such a conclusion would be inconceivable in relation to the conception which we have from experience. Expanding experience might make the "inconceivable" conceivable, but, at any one time, the test of a true belief is the inconceivability of its negation.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, XIII, 87.

does not have. The test applied to the phenomenal order, not the noumenal; to the effects which the Absolute has upon man and not the Absolute itself.

. . . although we have no experience of the objective order in itself, we have experience of the manner in which the objective order affects us. Though we have no experience of noumena, we have experience of phenomena. And when experience generates in us a subjective order of conceptions that cannot be altered, we have the strongest possible warrant that the order of our conceptions corresponds to the order of phenomena.¹⁶³

All that the argument stated, therefore, was that we are incapable of conceiving that, under the same conditions, the "Unknowable can ever act upon human intelligence otherwise than it has always acted upon it."¹⁶⁴ The test affirmed nothing about the Unknowable except in relation to its effects upon the consciousness of man. The provisional definition of truth with which Fiske started must now be amended. Correspondence between the subjective order of conceptions and the objective order of relations among things is a definition of absolute truth. Such a truth is not "correlated with the conditions of our intelligence," and does not, therefore, concern us. Our concern is with relative truth, with the correspondence between the order of our conceptions and the order among phenomena. The revised test of truth, therefore, is to be stated: "When any given order among our conceptions is so coherent that it cannot be sundered except by the temporary annihilation of some one of its terms, there must be a corresponding order among phenomena."¹⁶⁵ When we define "reality" as "inexpugnable existence in consciousness," as Fiske did, then, when this persistent subjective order of conceptions is present, we are warranted in saying that "the subjective order is in every respect as real for us as the objective order would be if we could know it."¹⁶⁶

Fiske's alternative to Idealism (the denial of the existence of any objective reality) and Skepticism (the denial that truth

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, XIII, 101.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, 103-104.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XIII, 102.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII, 104.

can be attained at all) was prepared for by the limitation of the scope of the reference of truth on the one hand, and, on the other, by the insistence that truth is defined primarily by the constitution of the human mind. The thing-in-itself is not known, but the thing-as-known is real; "real", that is, in relation to human intelligence. Kant's "forms" are retained but they are made to refer to the order of experience from which they are derived. Since these forms are "evolutions, not pre-formations," to use Lewes's phrase, it is obvious that the meaning of the evolutionary process will be significant in defining what truth is. We are also enabled, through a study of the way in which these subjective "states of consciousness" arise, to reconcile "intuitionism" and "experientialism."¹⁶⁷

In contrast to "experientialism" the criterion of truth was to be found in that "indissoluble coherence among inner phenomena, which, in accordance with the postulate that all knowledge is the product of experience, must have been generated by an equally indissoluble coherence among outer phenomena."¹⁶⁸ In contrast to the "intuitionists" Fiske insisted that knowledge is ultimately derived from experience and that truth has reference to experience as it is evidenced in the human "states of consciousness." Truth is the complete adaptation of the order of conceptions to the order of phenomena; that is, it is a matter of adjustment in which there are established inner relations that are in "equilibrium" with outer relations.¹⁶⁹ But the assertion that all knowledge comes from experience (which was the "strength of Locke's position"), did not, for Fiske, invalidate Kant's contention that certain "forms" (Fiske preferred the term "tendencies") are present "even at birth." The doctrine of evolution supplied a basis upon which these two views could be reconciled and harmonized. The ideas usually referred to as innate or intuitionist were now seen to be the products of age-long adjustments to environment. Such ideas were really "tend-

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 106.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, XV, 362.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII, 135.

encies" which had been strengthened by uniform experiences through many generations until they had become so strong that the individual was unable to resist them. The experience test and the inconceivability test were therefore seen to be merely the "obverse faces of the same thing." Truth is that to which evolution testifies through the formation of tendencies within the human consciousness, these tendencies being "states of consciousness" or inner adjustments to outer relations.¹⁷⁰

The definition of Truth, absolutely speaking, therefore, will be found through an understanding of the ultimate meaning of the process of evolution. The highest and most certain tendencies of the human consciousness will be, on the one hand, the product at which the whole of evolution has aimed, and, on the other, indicative of the objective relations to which such tendencies are adjusted. Fiske was not content, therefore, to settle with a purely phenomenal designation of the indications of man's consciousness. The process of evolution itself was making the relationship of indication ever "truer"; that is, "true" in the absolute sense. Here Fiske's transcendentalist roots reasserted themselves. Evolution had produced the consciousness of man. Once this was established, Fiske had a tendency to ignore the phenomenal limitations of his test and to grant to the consciousness of man the ability to indicate objective or Absolute Reality. While he always held that man could consider the subjective order of conceptions *as if* it were true to the objective order, he came more and more to erase the limitations of the "as if" and to make the two orders identical for epistemological purposes.

Fiske used evolution to vindicate the claim of the human consciousness that its states of consciousness were valid, to assert that their indicated relation to the objective order of the cosmos was a true relation. The "a priorism" of these "forms" in the human mind was not prior with reference to the total experience

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XV, 236; "An association of subject and predicate, which answers to an objective relation of which the experience has been absolutely uniform, must be indissoluble, and *vice versa*" (*ibid.*, p. 237).

of the human race, but was prior with reference to any individual experience. Universality or uniformity was a valid test of what was true, but only when seen in the context of total evolution. On the individual level, the "obverse side" of this test ("inconceivability") became the indicated norm. From the standpoint of the individual Fiske did hold to an intuitionist theory of truth. He agreed with Kant's position "as long as individual experience is studied without reference to ancestral experience."¹⁷¹ But the validity of this individual intuition rested, not upon some a priori claim, but upon the process of evolution itself. Science, interpreting the experience of the human race, served to vindicate the intuitive convictions and truth-claims of the individual.

¹⁷¹ "When the Kantian asserts that the intuitions of right and wrong, as well as the intuitions of space and time, are independent of experience, he occupies a position which is impregnable, so long as the organizations of experience through successive generations is left out of the discussion" (*ibid.*, XVI, 107).

CHAPTER THREE

THE UTOPIA OF A COSMIST

IN 1888 FISKE published the first of a series of seven works in American history.¹ It was to these works that he was to devote much of his time during the next thirteen years, and for which he was to become most widely known. But the year 1888 does not mark the beginning of Fiske's historical interest, nor does it mark a transition point in his basic philosophical position. These volumes can be properly interpreted only when we see them as intensive, interpretative studies of a particular period in human history, designed to elaborate certain convictions about the pro-

¹ The seven books were not published according to the chronology of the periods with which they dealt. The completed series does present, however, a continuous interpretation of the history of the United States from the earliest explorations in the New World to the inauguration of Washington in 1789:

- (1) *The Discovery of America, with Some Account of Ancient America and the Spanish Conquest* (published in 1892).
- (2) *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors* (published in 1897).
- (3) *The Beginnings of New England, or The Puritan Theocracy in Its Relation to Civil and Religious Liberty.* (published in 1889).
- (4) *The Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America* (published in 1899).
- (5) *New France and New England* (published posthumously in 1902).
- (6) *The American Revolution* (published in 1891).
- (7) *The Critical Period of American History, 1783-1789* (published in 1888).

Fiske wrote one other major work on the history of the United States, *The Mississippi Valley in the Civil War* (1900). In the preface to that work he tells us that this volume "does not belong to the series in which I have for several years been dealing with the history of the United States." Rather, it was intended as "a purely military narrative . . . detached from the multitude of incidents which in a general history would form its contents" (*Writings*, XXIII, viii).

esses of history. Fiske held some of these convictions at least as early as his first article on Buckle in 1861. The writing of American history was another way in which he was able to interpret his conviction that within the cosmos was to be "perceived a directing will that was shaping man's destiny to noble ends."²

While Fiske's histories are filled with a multitude of details, many of which seem almost irrelevant to the main thread which he was pursuing, the works were designed to be interpretative of the details rather than a cataloguing of them. In the preface to the first published volume in the series, he reflected this in writing of the purpose of the book.

It makes no pretensions to completeness, either as a summary of the events of that period [1783-1789] or as a discussion of the political questions involved in them. I have aimed especially at grouping facts in such a way as to bring out and emphasize their causal sequence, and it is accordingly hoped that the book may prove useful to the student of American history.³

Fiske's interests, therefore, did not lead him to the kind of historical investigation which yields new incidental facts. He did insist, in the preface to *The Discovery of America*, that the book had been written from "the original sources of information"⁴ But this actually amounted to little more than rechecking the sources of other scholars. His contemporaries recognized that his real contribution was as a popular interpreter of history rather than as a researcher. Lyman Abbott's appraisal was typical:

In his history, . . . as in his philosophy, John Fiske is rather an interpreter than an original thinker or investigator; the value of his work lies in his interpretation of the course and causes of events rather than in a microscopic

² Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920* (New York, 1930), III, 203-204.

³ *The Critical Period of American History, 1783-1789*, preface, *Writings*, XII, vii. Cf. *The American Revolution*, preface, *Writings*, X, ix-x: "In writing the story of this period my design was not so much to contribute new facts as to shape the narrative in such a way as to emphasize relations of cause and effect that are often buried in the mass of details."

⁴ *The Discovery of America*, preface, *Writings*, I, xvi.

inquiry into minute details; in other words, he writes history dramatically and philosophically.⁵

The meaning of any event in history, for Fiske, was to be found in its relation to that development of man and society which yielded to an evolutionary interpretation. "Battles and coronations, poems and inventions, migrations and martyrdoms," he wrote, "acquire new meanings and awaken new emotions as we begin to discern their bearings upon the solemn work of the ages that is slowly winning for humanity a richer and more perfect life."⁶ So forceful was his conviction of the upward trend of human history that he could see little, if any, meaning in an event which failed to fit that pattern. The past was a simple story; the present an obvious transition to an equally simple and obvious future. That which did not fit in with this hopeful pattern of gradual growth had no real place in the account.⁷

Fiske was not willing to admit, however, that his "new way" of treating history was not "scientific." In 1868, long before he began to write his formal histories, he wrote, "During the present century the criticism of recorded events has gone far towards assuming the developed and systematized aspects of a science, and canons of belief have been established which it is not safe to disregard."⁸ In a later essay, written sometime after 1894,

⁵ Lyman Abbott, "John Fiske," *Outlook*, LXVIII (July 13, 1901), 619. Cf. Frank Waldo, "John Fiske: An American Scholar," *Education*, XXII (Feb., 1902), 337: "Mr. Fiske's reputation as an historian from the specialist's point of view, rests upon the successful presentation of the subjects taken up by him rather than as original investigations undertaken for the purpose of adding details to our systematic knowledge of the development of the American institutions." See also Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, III, 211.

⁶ *The Beginnings of New England, Writings*, VI, 10.

⁷ Cf. William Garrot Brown, "The Problem of the American Historian," *Atlantic Monthly*, XCII (Nov., 1903), 659: ". . . one sometimes feels that his [Fiske's] vision was so clear and undisturbed because there were things—dark things of the human spirit, contrarieties and puzzles and mysteries in men's lives and natures, . . . —which he did not see at all. . . . When one reflects on the whole view and notions of the past which he presents, one finds it too easy-going. The matter always seems a little too plain."

Cf. John Graham Brooks, "John Fiske," *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, XXIV (Aug., 1901), 176: "For the essential processes of life and society, he has no despairing word in any line that he ever wrote."

⁸ "Historical Difficulties," *Writings*, XVIII, 221.

he spoke of the "spirit proper for science" and the "spirit proper for history" as identical. The task of the historian, he wrote, is one of "exceeding delicacy, and the dispassionate spirit of science is needed for its successful performance."⁹ We have already noticed, however, that his interpretation of what constituted the "scientific" approach changed. His dissatisfaction with Humboldt, Buckle, and Comte, respectively, did not lead him to the denial of the validity of a general "scientific" methodology; it did lead him to change his attitude about the scope of that approach. He was quite certain that the proper method of interpreting historical facts was itself developing. It was not less, but more "scientific" to advance into areas which that approach had previously excluded. We are able to see farther than "giants in former days," he wrote, "because we stand upon their shoulders." But the added height brought new perspective and greater truth. "We are better equipped for getting at the truth, and it is a larger truth when we have got it."¹⁰

The scope of the truth revealed to those who stood at the vantage point from which Fiske sought to interpret history had few limits. At least it seemed increasingly so to him. To the eye of the historian, as he looked backward, were opened the long ages of time in which cosmic evolution was preparing man, psychologically and sociologically, for his role as an historical being. The pattern of laws which was to be read from this past gave promise of an historical destiny which included freedom for the individual, parliamentary democracy for the Society of Mankind, and peace and happiness for Humanity. The conviction that these ideals for the future history of man could be substantiated "scientifically" is most evident in his later writings. There are evidences in his earlier works, however, which suggest the conclusions at which he was later to arrive. In order to trace the development of his thought we must begin with his

⁹ "Old and New Ways of Treating History," *Essays Historical and Literary*, II, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 31.

early consideration of the laws according to which history developed and according to which it was to be interpreted. Next we will consider his treatment in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* of the evolution of the cosmos and the development of man and society. Finally, we will study his application of this "new way of treating history" in his later historical writings. Throughout the entire period we will find, beneath his search for scientific verification, his optimistic convictions about the nature and possibilities of man.

I. THE LAWS OF HISTORY

In the essay on Buckle in 1861, Fiske's major criticism of Buckle's "laws of history" was in relation to the exclusion of the moral element as determinative in progress. Buckle had listed four "leading propositions," or laws, which were to be considered as the basis of the history of civilization.

1st, That the progress of mankind depends on the success with which the laws of phenomena are investigated, and on the extent to which a knowledge of those laws is diffused. 2d, That before such investigation can begin, a spirit of skepticism must arise, which, at first aiding the investigation, is afterwards aided by it. 3d, That the discoveries thus made, increase the influence of intellectual truths, and diminish, relatively, not absolutely, the influence of moral truths; moral truths being more stationary than intellectual truths, and receiving fewer additions. 4th, That the great enemy of this movement, and therefore the great enemy of civilization, is the protective spirit; by which I mean the notion that society cannot prosper, unless the affairs of life are watched over and protected at nearly every turn by the state and the church; the state teaching men what they are to do, and the church teaching them what they are to believe.¹¹

Fiske was in essential agreement with Buckle concerning three of these four laws. He differed sharply with him, however, as to the validity of the third (which Fiske referred to as the second for purposes of discussion).¹² The substance of this law, as Fiske

¹¹ Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* (from the second London edition; New York and London, 1929), II, 1.

¹² "Mr. Buckle's Fallacies," *Writings*, XX, 171, 194. Fiske refused to credit Buckle with originality in respect to the formulation of the first law. It was,

saw it, was that "the intellectual element in our nature is advancing, while the moral element is not, and that knowledge is the cause of progress, while good intentions are not."¹³ This fallacy was based, he argued, upon two untenable assertions. The first was the assertion that the "native faculties of men do not improve, so that we must look for progress only in their acquisitions."¹⁴ He deplored this return to the old dispute about "the innate" and "the acquired," and concluded that the discovery of the physiologists that "every organism is constantly advancing in the vigour and complexity of its functions in relation to the conditions which surround it," settled the matter as far as he was concerned. This discovery, he said, carried not only the supposition that there was an evolutionary advance in "complexity of structure and variety of function," but also that there was an advance in the "activity and vigour of . . . faculties."¹⁵ Thus the progress of mankind is a progress of "internal power" as well as of "external advantage." The second of Buckle's untenable assertions was found in the statement that only "intellectual acquisitions" were advancing while "moral truths" remained stationary; hence the obvious conclusion, from Buckle's position, that civilization must be regulated solely by intellectual progress. Fiske categorically denied that the "essentials of morals" were just what they had been "for thousands of years." He was willing to admit that moral science had not been enriched "by as many discoveries as any one of the other sciences." But the answer to this was not that moral science did not advance, but that it was far more difficult and complicated than the rest. "The laws expressing the relations of men to one another are the most recondite of all, and the most liable to apparent exceptions. We are accordingly longer in ascertaining them."¹⁶ The moral

he said, just another phrasing of the position taken by G. H. Lewes, J. S. Mill, Comte, and Spencer. The remaining two (Buckle's second and fourth laws), "if limited to the period of which Mr. Buckle treats," were admitted to be "important additions to our knowledge of human history" (*ibid.*, XX, 141-142, 194).

¹³ *Ibid.*, XX, 142.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XX, 145-146.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XX, 143-144.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, XX, 162, 164-165.

feeling or conscience of man was just as much a natural faculty as his intellect, since "ethical emotions" were functions of the nervous system, and Fiske had already argued that natural faculties do develop. His own conclusion was that for social progress to be real, both moral and intellectual elements must be included.

There is no inconsistency in saying, on the one hand, that moral feeling is a civilizing agency, and, on the other hand, that the progress of civilization conforms to the successive transformations of opinion. For the ethical as well as all the other emotions enter largely into every opinion-forming process. Though our emotions do not combine into propositions the ideas which are constituent parts of our beliefs, they do none the less . . . sway the intellect as it performs this operation. The emotions accordingly enter into every act of belief, and there can be no complete theory of human opinion which leaves them out of account. . . . 'the double movement, moral and intellectual, is essential to the very idea of civilization,' and . . . without including both elements, there can be no complete theory of progress.¹⁷

On the basis of this criticism of Buckle, as far as can be determined from the stated agreements and disagreements, Fiske's position in 1861 contained six points.

First, human history should be studied as a science. That is, the actions of men and society conform to certain definite laws which can be discovered and interpreted.

Second, the progress of mankind depends upon the success with which these laws are discovered and interpreted. Progress in the intellectual convictions of man is an index to progress in the evolution of humanity.

Third, an attitude of skepticism is the "invariable preliminary" to any intellectual progress. By "skepticism" Fiske made clear that he did not mean "negativism"—"that philosophy which, not content with doubting, absolutely denies." True skepticism involved only the "suspension of judgment, or hesitation in forming or receiving an opinion."¹⁸ Even defined in this way, it would not hold true, he claimed, that skepticism was universally

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XX, 170.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XX, 172.

present. In the "theological" stage of mental evolution there was no place for skepticism. "As long as the phenomenal was as yet harder to comprehend and more difficult to control than the unseen and unexplored world that lay beyond it, scepticism was impossible." Indeed, in such a primitive society, such an attitude would have been harmful. Where men lacked "sympathetic and social feelings" the only bond which prevented the disorganization of society was the bond of a "firmly rooted and widespread belief." Skepticism was a luxury possible only to those who had learned to live with each other in peaceful relations.¹⁹ It was not until the metaphysical or "revolutionary period of modern society," therefore, that the skeptical spirit was in full operation. During this period (from the twelfth century to the present), however, it had been a motivating force. "It is the sceptical spirit, advocating liberty in politics and toleration in religion, which has been at the bottom of every change through which humanity has passed in modern times."²⁰ This spirit is most evident and most valuable in the period of transition from the metaphysical to the positive stage.

... it was not in the power of man, on first perceiving the inadequacy and incongruity of his old belief, to pass at once to the new. No one can reject an old system of opinions, which has shaped his thoughts and guided his actions in the past, and then take up a new system, to shape his thoughts and guide his actions in the future, without going through an intermediate state of painful and wearisome doubt.²¹

This fact, said Fiske, is as true for the race as it is for the individual. But once the transition is made and we enter the stage of the positive era, skepticism will no longer have a place. Whether a man believes or disbelieves an established fact of science does not alter the truth of the fact. "A truth once established remains forever a truth. We cannot choose but accept it. And science, as a body of established truths, cannot admit of scepticism."²² The three ages of man, then, are characterized by

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XX, 174-175.

²¹ *Ibid.*, XX, 179.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XX, 178.

²² *Ibid.*, XX, 181.

three dominant mental states: belief, doubt, and knowledge. These stages of civilization might well be named: the "period of credulity," the "period of scepticism," and the "period of science." Since we are only now entering the last stage, scepticism does appear as a necessary prerequisite to future knowledge.

Fourth, the "protective spirit"—in which the state and church control the beliefs and actions of men—is, *on the whole*, detrimental to progress. This holds true, however, only for society as it has existed for the past several centuries. In primitive society, far from being detrimental to progress, it was only in connection with the "strongest possible manifestations of the protective spirit" that progress took place.

On looking at the matter deductively, it will even appear that without the protective spirit there could have been no civilization. . . . As long as men could not live together peaceably, as long as they neither knew nor practiced the first principles of morality, there must have been some power sufficient to keep society from falling to pieces, or there could have been no progress at all; and the only such power conceivable was that total subjection of the many to the few which constitutes the protective system of government.²³

Every institution, therefore, is beneficial, but only *in its earliest period*. With this qualification, Fiske agreed with Buckle that the "protective spirit" which institutions fostered was detrimental to progress.

Fifth, the progress of man follows a course of evolution from the less perfect to the more perfect. This involves hereditary transmission of both structure and function. The principle holds not only for individuals, but also for large groups of individuals and for nations. "While some nations have been developing in some faculties, others have been developing in others, and the total movement has been ever onward. Each generation has inherited the faculties of the preceding, still further improved by constant employment."²⁴

Sixth, the evolution of man's faculties involves progress in

²³ *Ibid.*, XX, 187-188.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XX, 155-156.

both "intellectual truths" and "moral truths." The "ethical emotions" as well as the "intellect" are developing, since both are functions of the nervous system, and consequently natural functions.

These "laws of history" show the influence of both Darwinian evolutionism and Comtean Positivism. History conforms to a discernible evolutionary pattern or progress; its governing laws can be arrived at inductively, and the interpretation of these laws and the acceptance of them by men who have passed through the stage of skepticism constitute an index of progress. Institutions are of value to progress in the age of ignorance and immorality, but man is moving beyond the stage where he needs the controls which institutions supplied. Both intellectually and morally man is developing, in amassing truths relevant to each area and in the "internal power to know more clearly and to will more truly."

In 1868 and 1869 Fiske wrote two essays on "The Laws of History" which actually constitute his first major attempt at a philosophy of history, or "science of history," to use the name he preferred. In these articles he was still maintaining a positivistic approach as far as the emphasis upon attention to laws was concerned. Here, however, following Spencer, he attempted to express the evolution of history in a single formula which showed both its similarities to and its differences from general organic evolution. The differences were stated in two "differential elements" characteristic of social life: the "continuous establishment of relations within the organism in correspondence with relations already existing in the environment," and the "subordination of the corporate life to the individual life."²⁵

The first article was a defense of the position that social changes do conform to "fixed and ascertainable laws." This defense proceeded along two lines. First, he argued for a theory

²⁵ "The Laws of History [Part II]," *North American Review*, CIX (July, 1869), 219, 230.

of causation in history as opposed to a theory of chance.²⁶ Next, assuming that laws are observable in the phenomena of history, he went on to defend the position that such laws are to be regarded as "ultimate facts" rather than as "derivative expressions of a lawgiver." The historian should not concern himself with a search for origins or indications of purpose; the discovery of law itself was his only legitimate task: to ascertain "the conditions of coexistence and the modes of sequence of historic phenomena."²⁷

This specified task—the discovery of these laws—became the subject of the second essay. At the outset Fiske stated that he had no intention of attempting an exhaustive inductive approach to the problem. The phenomena of history were so extensive and complex that "ordinary inductive methods" were of little use. The method used would necessarily be a deductive one, and the "discussion of endless minute historical details must be reserved until the law of social changes has been deduced from more general phenomena, and is ready for inductive verification."²⁸ The most general phenomenon which he could find in the history of social changes was that these changes constituted phases of progress; they showed a development from "a worse to a better state of things." This did not mean that human history had "in all times and places been the history of progress"; there had been occasions of retrogression. It did mean that progress had been the "most prominent feature of a considerable and important portion of mankind."²⁹ The interpretation of this fact would yield the sought-for law.

The starting point he found suggested in John William Draper's *A History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (New York, 1863). He did not agree with Draper's theory that "social life repeats the phases of individual life," but this theory did "approximate the truth" that society could and should be

²⁶ "The Laws of History, Part I," *Fortnightly Review*, N. S. IV (Sept., 1868), 279-286.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

²⁸ "The Laws of History [Part II]," *North American Review*, CIX, 198.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

treated as an organism.³⁰ The core of the principle of organic evolution—the change from homogeneity to heterogeneity—had been established by von Baer; Herbert Spencer had discovered that integration, or the change from indefiniteness to definiteness of structure, was an equally vital part of the process. Could it be established that this description of organic evolution was equally characteristic of social progress? For the answer to this Fiske turned to Henry Sumner Maine's *Ancient Law; Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (London, 1863). Here he found what he considered to be proof that both the "internal progress of all nations" and the "divergent courses pursued by many communities which have started from a common origin," illustrated this general law of organic development.³¹ The difficulty however, said Fiske, is that the law is too general—a fact which Spencer had observed in his *Principles of Psychology*. The need is for a law which will take into consideration the "differential characteristic by which an historic event is distinguished from a physical event." This specification of the law, as Spencer had stated it, was that life "consists in the continuous establishment of relations within the organism in correspondence with relations already existing in the environment."³² When this is applied to historical phenomena, it is seen that the progress of society is a process of adaptation, the legitimate aim of any civilization being the "attainment and maintenance of an equilibrium between the wants of men and the outward means of satisfying them."³³

But the law is still too general to serve. As it stands it applies equally to the phenomena of social and organic life. Just as a specification needed to be made to exclude physical events, so another differential element must be added to exclude the peculiarities of organic life. The clue to this second differential element was found in Maine's observation that the same process

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-216.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 219. Cf. Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, I, 293-294.

³³ "The Laws of History [Part II], *North American Review*, CIX, 221.

which had resulted in the "formation of social aggregates of a higher and higher order," had also resulted in the "more and more complete subordination of the requirements of the aggregate to the requirements of the individual." This observation marked the distinction between the two classes of phenomena:

In organic development, individual life is more and more submerged in corporate life. In social development, corporate life is more and more subordinated to individual life. The highest organic life is that in which the units have the least possible freedom. The highest social life is that in which the units have the greatest possible freedom.³⁴

This consideration of society as an organism and the interpretation of history according to the general law of evolution were the necessary steps between the rather incomplete position evidenced in the article on Buckle and the position set down in full in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*. By 1869 Fiske had rejected the slow, somewhat unwieldy inductive method of arriving at the laws of history which Buckle had used, and had adopted a deductive method. That method operated from the premise that human history was a story of progress. Fiske's view was widening. He had ceased to be interested in tracing the development of particular social institutions. He was firmly convinced that every group of phenomena, including the social, portrayed progress, and that the general formula of evolution was the key which would unlock the secrets of the cosmos. Freed of the restraining method of the empirical scientist, the historian could leap from man to society, from earth to the universe, bringing all within the bounds of one great formula of progressive development, leaving the inductive verification to the scientists of a later day. Spencer's system set Fiske's convictions free. The panorama of progress, in his mind, knew no bounds; the history of man stretched from the first pulse of force in the outer nebulae of the universe, through the almost endless reaches of time and, by implication at least, into eternity itself. Nothing was too

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

small or too distant to have its effect upon this central movement which carried man toward his noble destiny.

This change in Fiske's approach to the interpretation of history is evident in the late and somewhat incomplete essay, "Old and New Ways of Treating History," which he published in 1894. He was still convinced then, as he was in 1861, that history was to be studied as a "science." The mark of the "growing intellectual maturity" among historians was the "strict deference paid to facts."³⁵ But the interpretation of history which he advocated in 1894 had no hint of Comte's stages and consequent discussion of the importance of skepticism or the force of institutions in the various stages. History was seen as a unit; its laws were considered to be more universal. In the first place, the true historian should not neglect any race or group of people in his study simply because they are primitive in their intellect or savage in their moral feelings and acts. Only by understanding the primitive, savage past of the human race can we interpret the present and learn "lessons useful for the future."³⁶ Second, the modern historian should follow "all the threads in the story of national progress simultaneously." That is, he is not to be content to tell the story of "kings and battles and court intrigues," but must pay more attention to "the history of commerce and finance, to geographical circumstances, to the social conditions of peoples, to the changes in beliefs, to the progress of literature and art."³⁷ Third, the new historian should not treat history simply as a physical science and ignore the moral causes of the destinies of nations. Climate and soil are important, but not all-determinative. Nor is history simply the biographies of great men. Great men do shape the destinies of nations; "a Cromwell or a Luther may count for more than a million ordinary men." But great men are not isolated causes; ". . . after all, our ultimate source of enlightenment still lies in the study of the general conditions under which

³⁵ "Old and New Ways of Treating History," *Essays Historical and Literary*, II,

16-17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 23.

³⁷ *Idem*.

the activity of our Cromwell or Luther was brought forth." The "silent operation of common and familiar forces" is more influential and determinative in history than the "unusual or catastrophic."³⁸ Fiske extended this last point to cover the great periods of history. Our perspective is warped, he said, when we give exclusive attention to the great literary or classical periods and ignore the "middle ages." There is no "break" in history; the cause-effect chain is continuous. The "darkness" of a "dark age" is mainly in the mind of the historian who uses the epithet.³⁹

The comparison of Fiske's earlier and later concern with the laws of history reveals three factors which were to become increasingly significant in his interpretation of history. First, there was a growing tendency to supplement the rigidly empiricist method of investigating historical facts with a more deductive approach. Fiske wanted one law which would be inclusive enough to interpret any and all events which had any connection with man's historical development. This law he found in Spencer's "Law of Evolution," modified in such a way that it provided for the "differential elements" which distinguished social evolution from organic evolution. One important result of this interpretation of history according to a single law was his view of history as a unity. His early acceptance of Comte's "stages" disappeared and in its place appeared a scheme of history which interpreted every event as growing out of preceding events according to a rather rigid causal system. A second factor is to be seen in the tendency to give less attention to details as such and more attention to the importance of any detail or event in terms of its contribution to the desired "end" of history. This growing teleological emphasis was, in part, a reflection of Fiske's insistence upon the unity of the historical process. But more than that, it was the result of his conviction that progress is the keynote of history. Events which did not contribute to progress, as Fiske interpreted the term, were historically insignificant. A third factor was the emphasis upon the influence of morality in

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 28.

historical development. This was to become the center of emphasis in his later philosophical treatment of history and the destiny of man. It was already present, however, in the article on Buckle. For Fiske the moral forces, arising from the naturally evolved faculties of man, became increasingly important as the motivating power in human history. Such an emphasis was to make possible an interpretation of the destiny of man and the end of history in terms drawn from the liberal Christian tradition. These convictions about the "Law of History" and the implications of that law were fairly well formed in Fiske's mind by 1874. In the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* he sought to show how the cosmic process, interpreted according to this law, indicated the eventual achievement of a society in which would be realized those ideals which the prophets of his age were beginning to envision.

II. THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN HISTORY

In the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* Fiske spoke of Spencer's philosophy as the apex of a process of intellectual thinking which he called "dynamical" thinking as contrasted to "statical" thinking.⁴⁰ The "Law of Evolution" was itself a "striking illustration of that process of Evolution which it formulates." Just as Newton's hypothesis of gravitation enabled the extension in the spatial order of the "correspondence between the order of human conceptions and the order of phenomena," so Spencer's hypothesis enabled an extension of this correspondence in time.⁴¹

The announcement of a verifiable Law of Evolution is but the most recent phase of a process which has been going on from the time when man first began to speculate about the world of phenomena,—the process of substituting what may be called dynamical habits of thought for statical habits. Clearly the formulation of a theory of the universe, whether as expressed in the crude mythologies of the barbarians or in the elaborate systems of modern philosophers, is the establishment of a complex group

⁴⁰ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 170 ff., 322 ff.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 170. Thus Newton's discovery enabled man "to adjust his mental sequences to phenomena as distant as the Milky Way"; Spencer's discovery "carries back the adjustments till they comprehend the birth of the Solar System."

of subjective relations that are either very imperfectly or much more completely adjusted to objective relations.⁴²

The difference between statical thinking and dynamical thinking could be expressed in terms of the extension of these correspondences. The statical view is one which is "adjusted solely or chiefly to relations existing in the immediate environment of the thinker."⁴³ Under this system men take for granted that the world itself, our laws, our social institutions, our philosophical doctrines, indeed, the very thoughts and feelings of men, have always been just what they are today. The dynamical view, on the other hand, looks back upon things as continually changing in "a definite and irreversible order of sequence." It views the universe and all that it contains as "presenting a different aspect from epoch to epoch."⁴⁴ Evolution itself, therefore, had provided men with a method of interpreting the evolutionary development of man and the universe.

... this immense widening of the mental horizon which modern times have witnessed, this power of criticizing sympathetically the relatively rude theories, customs, and prejudices of bygone generations, this ability to realize in imagination a time when forms of life now wholly distinct were represented by a common ancestral type, or a time when the material universe existed in a shape very different from that in which it is presented to our senses, this growing tendency to interpret groups of phenomena by reference to other groups of phenomena long preceding, are all alike explicable, in an ultimate analysis, as a prodigious extension in time of the correspondence between the human mind and its environment.⁴⁵

The Law of Evolution was simply a systematic way of stating this dynamical way of viewing things. As such, Fiske believed it provided the most truly "philosophic" method of interpreting history. The use of this method upon the ever-increasing store of facts which the separate sciences provided enabled man to find at least a "provisional answer to the time-honoured questions of philosophy—whence came we, what are

⁴² *Ibid.*, XVI, 170-171.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 172, 326.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 322.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 173-174.

we, and whither do we tend?"⁴⁶ The application of the law was to be made to all historical phenomena, from the development of the planetary system, to the origin of man, with his intellect and moral sense, and to the process known as civilization. The whole range of phenomena would then reveal its secrets; the causal chain would become evident; the resultant picture would be that of the history of man, the "crown and glory of the universe as we know it."⁴⁷

Fiske admitted, as he began this task, that "scientific inference" had no answer to the question of the ultimate origin of the universe. After science had guided man to the "outermost verge" there still remained an "infinity and an eternity, . . . the secrets of which we may not hope to unravel." On this outermost edge, science left the thoughts of man with only a "vague glimpse of a stupendous rhythmical alternation between eras of Evolution and eras of Dissolution, succeeding each other 'without vestiges of a beginning and without prospect of an end.'"⁴⁸ But whatever the ultimate origin of the universe, Fiske was confident that the Law of Evolution was expressed in the more immediate origin of our own solar system. He began with the observable fact of the radiation of heat from the sun and the planets. This radiation of heat meant a loss or dissipation of motion, necessarily accompanied by the concentration of matter. ". . . from time immemorial the various members of our planetary system have all been decreasing in volume and increasing in density; so that the farther back in time we go, the larger and less solid must we suppose them to have been."⁴⁹ Eventually, therefore, we have the picture of the sun as a "mass of nebulous vapour, extending in every direction far beyond the limits of the solar system. . . ." Given this, said Fiske, the work of Kant and Laplace had shown that the "mere contraction of such a mass must inevitably have brought about just the state of things which we now find."⁵⁰ Out

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI, 166.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XVI, 168.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, XIV, 310-311.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV, 253.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV, 254-255.

of this "homogeneous nebula" the planetary system had developed.

. . . this gigantic process of Planetary Evolution, in which the integration of matter and the concomitant dissipation of molecular motion, kept up during untold millions of ages, has brought about the gradual transformation of a relatively homogeneous, indefinite, and incoherent mass of nebular vapour into a decidedly heterogeneous, definite, and coherent system of worlds.⁵¹

The great chain of evolution, as it concerns man, narrows down to the development of one of these worlds, the earth itself. Here, in addition to those factors which the earth shared with general planetary development, another factor is present. "The chief circumstance which has favoured terrestrial heterogeneity has been the continuous supply of molecular motion from the sun."⁵² The transformation of solar radiation is the most significant source of the phenomena of terrestrial evolution. If we exclude volcanic and tidal movements, then all the movements of "gaseous, liquid, and solid matter upon the earth's surface . . . are simply transformations of the heat which is generated by the progressive integration of the sun's mass."⁵³ This includes the assertion, said Fiske, that the phenomena of life are among those due to solar radiation. First, he discussed how nutrition, innervation, and muscular action are derived from the process.⁵⁴ Next, he pointed out that the "psychical phenomena of feeling and thought" are linked to the other phenomena in this process.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XIV, 301.

⁵² *Ibid.*, XIV, 315-316.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XIV, 326-328.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, XIV, 328-334. His example of nutrition was that of the growth of a tree from a seed, a process effected by the energy received from "solar undulations" which warm the soil, set up "chemical motions" in the leaves, etc.

His examples of innervation were the transformation of decaying forests into coal, the turning of a windmill "driven by atmospheric currents which the sun set in motion," and the turning of a waterwheel "kept whirling by streams raised by the sun to the heights from which they are rushing down."

The case of muscular action was illustrated by reference to the assimilation by animals of the "sun-derived power" in vegetable tissues. This power is "metamorphosed into the dynamic energy which maintains the growth of the animal organism." Surplus energy is expended in "running, jumping, flying, swimming, or climbing, as well as in fighting with enemies, and in seizing and devouring prey."

Though . . . the gulf between the phenomena of consciousness and all other phenomena is an impassable gulf, which no future extension of scientific knowledge is likely to bridge over, it is nevertheless unquestionable both that every change in consciousness is conditioned by a chemical change in ganglionic tissue, and also that there is a discernible quantitative correspondence between the two parallel changes.⁵⁵

This latter observation concerning the thoughts and feelings of man was to be developed into one of Fiske's more important lines of thought. We need here to notice that he did not intend to argue that physical energies are transformed into mental processes. The necessary conclusion, he said, is "that there is no such thing as a change in consciousness which has not for its correlative a chemical change in nervous tissue."⁵⁶ The point of emphasis was that there is an "objective correlation" between the changes in consciousness and solar radiance, and "correlation" was connection enough to permit Fiske's grand illustrative statement of how the very thought processes of man are linked to the primeval source of energy in the unfathomable reaches of the universe through the medium of solar radiance.

Waves of this radiance, speeding earthward from the sun, . . . impart their motor energy to the atoms which vibrate in unison in the compound molecules of the growing grass. Cattle, browsing on this grass, and integrating portions of it with their tissues, rearrange its molecules in more complex clusters, in which the tremendous chemical energy of heat-saturated nitrogen is held in equilibrium by the aid of these metamorphosed sunbeams. Man, assimilating the nitrogenous tissues of the cow, builds up these clusters of molecules, with their stores of sun-given and sun-restrained energy, into the wondrously complex elements of white and grey nerve-tissue, which, incessantly liberating energy in decomposition, mysteriously enable him to trace and describe a portion of the astonishing metamorphosis.⁵⁷

Having established the connection between primeval energy and the life-processes of man, Fiske turned to the discussion of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XIV, 334-335.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XIV, 338. Cf. Royce's introduction, *ibid.*, XIII, lviii-lix.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XIV, 339-340.

the problem of the origin of life upon the earth. It was his intention to show that the first appearance of life was not necessarily sudden or abnormal. His argument was based upon the theory that the "consolidation and cooling of this original gaseous planet" gave rise to "the endless varieties of structures, organic as well as inorganic, which the earth's surface now presents"; the origin of life was really just one chapter in the "chemical history of the earth."⁵⁸ The same process by which the "lower and more stable aggregations of molecules which constitute a single or double salt were built up" was operative in the development of the higher and less stable aggregations of molecules which constitute protoplasm.

We are bound to admit . . . that as carbonic acid and ammonia, when brought into juxtaposition, united by virtue of their inherent properties as soon as the diminishing temperature would let them, so also carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen, were brought into juxtaposition, united by virtue of their inherent properties into higher and higher multiples as fast as the diminishing temperature would let them, until at last living protoplasm was the result of the long-continued process.⁵⁹

Only two factors, therefore, were really essential to the origin of life: the presence of the proper chemical constituents and a cooling process. The significant thing which Fiske found in this conclusion was the evidence of the "continuity in cosmic evolution"; between the various groups of natural phenomena there were no sharp demarcations.

Though as we advance from a lower grade of heterogeneity to a higher grade we encounter differences of property or of functional manifestations which we may broadly classify as differences of kind, the conclusion is nevertheless forced upon us that such differences of kind are ultimately reducible to differences of degree, and that at bottom there is no break whatever in the continuity of the process of Evolution.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XIV, 361.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV, 365. Thus the only fundamental difference between a chemical salt and protoplasm is "the greater molecular complexity and consequent instability of the latter."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV, 368.

In the consideration of the origin of the more complex forms of life, this conclusion necessitated the rejection of the doctrine of special creations in favor of the doctrine of derivation. The former explained nothing about the phenomena of both extinct and living organisms except their origin, and this only, said Fiske, on the basis of "absurd or impossible assumptions." This doctrine was to be consigned, therefore, to "that limbo where hover the ghosts of the slaughtered theories that were born of man's untutored intelligence in early times."⁶¹ The work of the cosmic historian was necessarily linked to the use of the "Theory of Derivation."

The next step in outlining the derivation of higher forms from lower forms was to establish the *modus operandi* of the change. This work had been done by Darwin in his theory of natural selection. The theory, as Fiske stated it, was that "the organisms which survived and propagate their kind are those which are best adapted to the conditions in which they live."⁶² Adaptation was the key to the evolutionary process. The process was kept continuously operative by the fact of constant change in the physical condition of the earth; organisms could not remain constant and live. But Fiske was not content to accept Darwin's theory as the sole explanation of the force behind the change. He felt that the theory needed to be supplemented before it could become a complete explanation of the phenomena with which it dealt. He noted, for example, that there are certain variations in a single generation, where a large number of individuals have varied in a given direction. Such change cannot be traced to natural selection but rather suggests a "direct adaptation to new physical and social conditions." There seems to be an "inherent capacity for adaptive change" present in all organisms.⁶³ This capacity determines, at least in part, the variations which later are selected or rejected.

Fiske classified these forces which are at work in the life

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, XIV, 411.

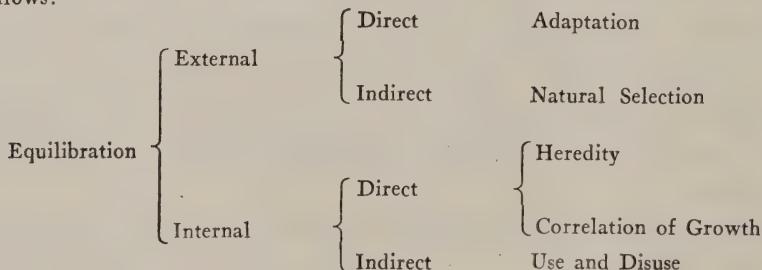
⁶² *Ibid.*, XV, 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XV, 80-81.

history of an organism or group of organisms. The whole was a process of equilibration. Equilibration was of two kinds, external and internal. Each of these could be either direct or indirect. External direct equilibration was exemplified in adaptation shown in the adjustment of a group of organisms to changing external circumstances. External indirect equilibration was to be seen in the negative side of natural selection—the rejection of those members which did not become directly adapted. Internal direct equilibration was to be seen in heredity and in correlation of growth; internal indirect equilibration, in the development of “used” organs and the decay of “disused” organs.⁶⁴ The process of life, therefore, has been a process of “continuous equilibration of the organism with its environment.” This gave Fiske his definition of life, and prepared the way for his evolutionary treatment of the phenomena of mind and society which have played so large and determinative a part in the history of man. This definition he took over from Spencer: “Life—including also intelligence as the highest known manifestation of Life—is the continuous establishment of relations within the organism, in correspondence with relations existing or arising in the environment.”⁶⁵

The examination of this adjustment in the various stages or degrees of life revealed that the higher up in the scale of life the organism appears, the more psychical the adjustment becomes. From the lowest to the highest type of life there are

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XV, 94-95. Fiske's diagrammatic presentation of these forces is as follows:



⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XV, 97, 106.

present certain vital relations, set up internally in adjustment to external relations. But the nature of these relations changes as we move from one step to the next. ". . . while in the vegetal world, and in the lower regions of the animal world, the life is purely or almost purely physico-chemical, it becomes more and more predominantly psychical as we ascend in the animal world, until at the summit it is mainly psychical."⁶⁶ This necessitates a recognition of a distinction between the provinces of psychology and biology, and prepares for the consideration of a "psychical" evolution as contrasted to a purely "physical" one.

Fiske undertook to state, as an expositor of Spencer, the hypothetical "ultimate units of feeling in the manifold compounding of which all conscious operations, whether intellectual or emotional, consist."⁶⁷ All mental operations, though they differ immensely in complexity, have a fundamental unity; they are made up of the same psychical process. The grouping of the relations among feelings is the elementary act which is repeated alike in each simple and direct act of perception, and in each complicated and indirect act of ratiocination.⁶⁸ Underlying all such relations is the "relation of *likeness* and *unlikeness* between primary states of consciousness." Given the power of recognizing two feelings or conscious states as like or unlike each other, "we have the primordial process in the manifold compounding of which all operations of intelligence consist."⁶⁹

If cognition depends, however, upon recognition (the ability to classify any two feelings as like or unlike), how can there be any "first cognition?" How can intelligence begin at all, if the first and simplest act of intelligence implies a reference to experiences which preceded the act? Fiske's answer was that mental life must ultimately be composed of elements that are separately unconscious: "the states of consciousness may be produced by the differential grouping or compounding of psychical states which are beneath consciousness."⁷⁰ The ultimate unit of

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, 125.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, XV, 172-173.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, 142-143.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XV, 178.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, XV, 171.

which the mind is composed, therefore, is a "simple *psychical shock*, answering to that simple *physical pulsation* which is the ultimate unit of nervous action."⁷¹ The compounding of these "primitive psychical shocks" is the point of unity present in all psychical activity from the lowest to the highest form. The result of this correlation of psychical shocks and physical pulsations sets the stage for a discussion of the evolution of psychical function as correlated with the evolution of nerve structure. Mind is not identified with matter or motion; this is significant. But there is a correlation between the phenomena of mind and the phenomena of matter and motion, and it is, therefore, possible to describe the evolution of the former by the same formula which describes the evolution of the latter.

This idea of correlation also permitted Fiske to give what he considered to be an adequate solution to the epistemological problem raised by Locke's theory of *tabula rasa*, on the one hand, and the theory of innate or intuitionist ideas of Kant and Leibniz on the other. He disagreed with Locke, insisting that the "mind of the infant cannot be compared to a blank sheet, but rather to a sheet already written over here and there with invisible ink, which tends to show itself as the chemistry of experience supplies the requisite conditions."⁷² The infant inherits from the parent a certain pattern of "transit lines" or "nerve connections." This inherited tendency to certain patterns is strongest in the lower or instinctive regions of psychical activity, because the patterns are so frequently repeated on this level. As we move up the scale, however, greater speciality and complexity appear with a consequent relative infrequency of repetition. On the higher levels the development of fixed or automatic patterns is the result of both inheritance and early training. The co-ordination between the impressions we receive and the motions we make, therefore, is not complete until after birth, in early childhood. Rather than being simply a "blank tablet," the infant's

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, XV, 190-191.

⁷² *Ibid.*, XV, 236.

mind is actually already "correlated with the functions of a complex mass of nerve tissue" which has received a definite tendency from the parent, although complete correlation is effected finally by the infant's early experience.⁷³ Leibniz and Kant were wrong, said Fiske, in assuming "a kind of intuitional knowledge not ultimately due to experience." All ideas are the result of these tendencies in the "cerebral tissue," and these tendencies are the product of the "uniform experiences of countless generations." Locke was right in the assertion that all knowledge is ultimately derived from experience, from intercourse between the organism and environment. But Kant was also right in his recognition that the brain has definite tendencies, even at birth.⁷⁴

The outline of the psychical evolution of man is not complete, however, until it has accounted for the development of those "higher manifestations of thought and feeling which distinguish civilized man from inferior mammals, and in a less-marked degree from uncivilized man."⁷⁵ These manifestations are the "products of countless ages of social evolution," and Fiske turned to the task of tracing this development with the aim of showing how it had affected the historical development of man. The two prime factors in social progress are the "community and the environment." Environment includes not only certain obvious physical factors, but psychical factors as well. The more civilization advances, the more important these psychical factors become. Fiske accepted Comte's definition of social progress as a "gradual supplanting of egoism by altruism"—a continuous weakening of selfishness and a continuous strengthening of sympathy.⁷⁶ The development of civilization, therefore, is a process of adjustment between community and environment

⁷³ *Ibid.*, XV, 232 ff. Thus the prolongation of the period of infancy is really the result of increasing intelligence in the higher animals, and particularly in man. This affords the point of transition to the higher development of man, since Fiske interpreted this period as the "proximate cause" of the origin of social relations and moral or ethical feelings.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XV, 236.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XV, 295.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, 239.

in which there is a development of altruistic feelings and a gradual atrophy of egoistic feelings. The chief motivating factor in this pattern of development is the growth of the community in size and complexity—that is, there is an enlargement of the area and an increase in the situations which demand the exercise of altruistic feelings.⁷⁷ The law of use and disuse works to weaken the egoistic feelings which are “less and less imperatively called into play” and to strengthen the altruistic feelings which find in each successive epoch a wider scope of activity. The more complex or heterogeneous the environment, the more rapid the process of adjustment becomes and the more certain the growth of altruism is.⁷⁸

Fiske added to these features, which “social integration” shares with “biological integration,” the feature of “individuation”—a point which he had made earlier in the second part of the “Laws of History.” The “same process, which has resulted in the formation of social aggregates of a higher and higher order, has also resulted in the more and more complete subordination of the requirements of the aggregate to the requirements of the individual.”⁷⁹ The highest social life is that in which the individual units have the greatest possible freedom. This fact is doubly important for the progress of man and to the interpretation of history. More freedom for the unit means that the psychical forces, and especially those of the higher order, become more and more pronounced and effective the higher we go in the scale of society, because in a community “the psychical life is all in the parts”—not in the whole.⁸⁰ Individuation thus provides the sociological basis for the development of the “higher modifications of thought and feeling” which distinguish civilized man and mark the direction of the historical progress of man. But the introduction of this idea into a sociological system which had as the specified end of the whole a “definite, coherent heterogeneity” created difficulties. Fiske was aware of this and

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, 299.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, XV, 327.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, XV, 305.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, XV, 332.

attempted an explanation, in Darwinian terms, on the basis of natural selection.

In a primitive society the tribal groups which will prevail in the struggle for existence will be those "in which the lawless tendencies of individuals are most thoroughly subordinated by the yoke of tyrannical custom." The tribes with the strongest sense of corporate responsibility, the most rigid family relationships, the most "despotic yoke of custom," will grow at the expense of those tribes in which the means of securing concerted action over wide areas are less perfect.⁸¹ The operation of natural selection upon primitive tribes thus explains the growth of such "lower" type aggregates. But how does society get past this stage, on a strictly evolutionary basis, to an aggregate of the "higher" type? On the surface it would seem necessary for the process to reverse itself, since the "very state of things which is preeminently useful in bringing man out of savagery is also likely to be preeminently in the way of their attaining to a persistently progressive civilization." The tyranny of custom prevents reorganization of society and consequent growth; but the relaxation of such tyranny also invites lawlessness. Some such relaxation, with some retained control, is necessary, however. "The progressive races are just those which in some way avoided this dilemma,—which have succeeded in securing concerted action among individuals without going so far as to kill out the tendency to individual variations."⁸² The pattern which natural selection has come to favor, therefore, has been one of "innovation without revolution." Fiske found this pattern exemplified at its best in the European Aryan tradition or civilization.

... both in historic and prehistoric times, the European Aryans . . . seem to have profited by circumstances tending to encourage individuality without weakening concentration. Hence the peculiarly plastic consistency—the flexibility combined with toughness—of West-Aryan civilization. Hence the European races all possess the capacity of innovating without revolution.⁸³

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 22.

⁸² *Ibid.*, XVI, 26.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 38.

In terms of organic evolution, this is the problem of understanding the conditions which will result in "continuous increase of structural and functional complexity," the problem of compromise between "fluidity and rigidity."⁸⁴ On the basis of this "fundamental homology between the special process here considered and the more general process which includes it," we see that "one chief circumstance which secures mobility without loss of coherence is a heterogeneous and ever-changing social environment, to the heterogeneous changes of which the community is required to adjust itself." That civilization progresses which has gained enough uniformity to ensure concerted action, without sacrificing its versatility of mind in the process. Natural selection, operating through such environmental factors as the continual change of forces to be overcome and of natural obstacles to be surmounted, eliminates those which do not or cannot make these adjustments.⁸⁵

Up to this point in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*, Fiske had discussed the development of history from two approaches. Proceeding on the general assumption that life is a process of adjustment, he first showed that this adjustment is becoming increasingly "psychical" in character as we go up the scale of progress. This slow movement does not, however, involve a radical change or growth from "physical" to "psychical," a process in which the latter would evolve out of the former. Rather it is a movement in which natural selection comes to favor the psychical adjustments at the expense of purely physical adjustments. The "Genesis of Man, Intellectually," therefore, is really a "new chapter in the history of the evolution of life." Natural selection "crossed the Rubicon" of its process when it began to "confine itself chiefly to variations in psychical manifestations."⁸⁶ As long as the chief responses to environment were of the nature of physical changes, natural selection could operate only on the basis of such changes. "But when an animal had once appeared, en-

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 43-44.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI, 44, 35.

dowed with sufficient intelligence to chip a stone tool and hurl a weapon, natural selection will take advantage of variations in this intelligence, to the comparative neglect of purely physical variations.”⁸⁷ This point really marks the beginning of significant human history, and this change in the direction of natural selection set the stage for future development. The human race stands at the peak of zoological development. No race or organism can now be produced which will be zoologically distinct from or superior to man. Changes in physical constitution will be slight, and the direction of change will be toward development of psychical attributes.⁸⁸

The appearance of intelligence in the process of evolution thus accounts for a part of man’s progress from the brute stage to the stage where further progress will be almost totally in the area of psychical development. But we have seen that, for Fiske, this was only one half of the whole picture. The “higher manifestations” of thought and feeling are linked to social evolution. The “moral evolution” of man, which lies at the base of all advanced social life and of the phenomena of ethics and religion, has been dependent upon “that increasing heterogeneity of experience which social intercourse has supplied.”⁸⁹ The origin of these moral feelings must be explained before the account of the evolution of “Civilization” can be complete and the hopes of man for a larger and richer future can be justified. The basic question which Fiske confronted here was how social evolution really originated. He began his explanation with an examination of utilitarian hedonism and its motives of pleasure and pain as the sources of good and bad actions. He did not agree that the theory of pleasure and pain alone could adequately form the basis for a general doctrine of morality. If we were concerned only with “the incentives to action in a race of brute animals,” such a theory would be sufficient. But on a higher level the element of the well-being of the community enters and introduces

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, XVI, 96.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 156, 162.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 99-100.

a complicating factor. "Right" and "Wrong" no longer apply only to the pleasurable or painful actions of the individual. These concepts are now redefined in terms of community well-being.

According to utilitarianism . . . as here expounded, the conduct approved as moral is the disinterested service of the community, and the conduct stigmatized as immoral is the selfish preference of individual interests to those of the community. And bearing in mind that the community . . . has by long-continued social integration come to comprise the entire human race, we have the ultimate theorem of the utilitarian philosophy, as properly understood, that actions morally right are those which are beneficial to Humanity, while actions morally wrong are those which are detrimental to Humanity.⁹⁰

How does this sense of right and wrong arise? Fiske defined it as essentially an instinctive approval or disapproval of actions: "there is in our psychical structure a moral sense which is as quickly and directly hurt by wrong-doing or the idea of wrong-doing as our tactile sense is hurt by stinging."⁹¹ Some added force within man has succeeded in changing the motives of pleasure and pain into the higher motives common to sociality. The problem is to find the source of this force, and Fiske found it through the medium of his theory of the "prolongation of infancy."

In his treatment of the parallel evolution of the mind and the nervous system, he stated that the increase of intelligence in complexity and speciality involves a lengthening of the period during which the nervous connections involved in adjustments are becoming organized. While the nervous connections accompanying simple intelligence might be already organized at birth, those accompanying complex intellectual processes are chiefly organized after birth. The period of infancy, therefore, "psychologically considered, is the period during which the nerve connections and correlative ideal associations necessary for self-maintenance are becoming permanently established." The more complex the in-

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 125.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 126.

telligence is, the longer the period of infancy becomes.⁹² Throughout the animal kingdom this period of infancy is "correlated with feelings of parental affection." The longer the period of infancy becomes, the longer the duration of the feelings which are necessary to insure the protection of the infant. Thus the gradual lengthening of the period of infancy means a correlative development of a permanent family relationship.

The prolonged helplessness of the offspring must keep the parents together for longer and longer periods in successive epochs; and when at last the association is so long kept up that the older children are growing mature while the younger ones still need protection, the family relations begin to become permanent.⁹³

The establishment of the permanent family group is attended by the formation of certain definite relationships among the members; sympathy—the "power of ideally reproducing in one's self the pleasures and pains of another person"—becomes a marked characteristic of the members of the group. This power of sympathy grows as the family relationship becomes more and more integrated and enduring, and provides the added force which introduces the higher morality into sociality. It is the bridge by which we cross the "chasm which divides animality from humanity, gregariousness from sociality, hedonism from morality, the sense of pleasure and pain from the sense of right and wrong."⁹⁴ The prolongation of infancy is itself a consequence of increasing intelligence. It is an effect, therefore, of all those forces which have gone into the producing of a higher intellectual capacity in man. It is a part of that process which is called the evolution of the mind. On the other hand, the prolongation of infancy is one of the sources of those higher feelings which will mark the future development of man, historically, ethically, and religiously. "Natural selection . . . could never *unaided* have started the process of civilization or have given to man those peculiar attributes" which distinguish him from the highest ape

⁹² *Ibid.*, XVI, 130-131.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 136.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 134.

or brute animal. "In order to bring about that wonderful event, the Creation of Man, natural selection had to call in the aid of other agencies, and the chief of these agencies was the gradual lengthening of babyhood."⁹⁵ The process of higher development which natural selection made possible by its selection of intellectual variations in preference to physical variations is now extended another step.

In addition to this ethical sense, Fiske found in the period of infancy another characteristic which bears directly upon the progress of history. This is the element of "plasticity." In the lower animals the offspring receive their education before they are born. In other words, "heredity does everything for them, education nothing. The career of the individual is predetermined by the careers of his ancestors, and he can do *almost* nothing to vary it."⁹⁶ In man, however, the infant's career is no longer determined exclusively by heredity.

There is a period after birth when its character can be slightly modified by what happens to it after birth, that is, by its experience as an individual. It becomes educable. It is no longer necessary for each generation to be exactly like that which preceded. A door is opened through which the capacity for progress can enter.⁹⁷

This newly opened door provides the avenue to that society characterized by "fluidity and rigidity" which is the progressive society. The prolongation of infancy, while inevitably associated with a permanent social organization, provides for individuation. The finest example of the working out of that principle Fiske found in the history of the English race, and particularly in the American phase of that history.

⁹⁵ "The Meaning of Infancy," *Writings*, XIX, 280.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, XIX, 283-284. Fiske emphasized the almost because he was not willing to say definitely where "educability" stopped or started.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, XIX, 286. In man "the organized experience of the race counts for much, but the special experience of the individual counts for something in altering the future career of the race. . . . Instead of a few actually realized capacities, it [the infant] starts with a host of potential capacities, of which the play of circumstances must determine what ones shall be realizable" (*Cosmic Philosophy*, *Writings*, XVI, 160).

In our own country . . . the element of plasticity in man's nature is more thoroughly heeded, more fully taken account of, than in any other community known to history; and herein lies the chief potency of our promise for the future. We have come to the point where we are beginning to see that we may safely depart from unreasoning routine, and, with perfect freedom of thinking in science and in religion, with new methods of education that shall train our children to think for themselves while they interrogate Nature with a courage and an insight that shall grow ever bolder and keener, we may ere-long be able fully to avail ourselves of the fact that we come into the world as little children with undeveloped powers wherein lie latent all the possibilities of a higher and grander Humanity than has yet been seen upon the earth.⁹⁸

Fiske's major historical works centered in a somewhat detailed presentation of the American phase of this development of humanity. The work provides a specific illustration of his interpretation of history. Before we turn to these volumes, however, we need to take note of the implications which this idea of the prolongation of infancy had for him in his later years. In so doing we shall discover his basic intuitional convictions about man coming once more to the fore. The ultimate meaning of history, which he had traced in evolutionary terms, was found to reside in a grand teleology, the implications of which must finally be defined in religious terms.⁹⁹

A part of the significance of the idea of the prolongation of infancy was the emphasis which it placed upon the peculiarly "human" qualities. Here, in infancy, were born the germs of altruism and morality and here was provided the situation in which those feelings of altruism and morality could develop and expand. This emphasis meant that the theory really reinstated man in the center of the universe. It put him back into "the same exceptional position which he had seen himself as holding

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, XIX, 291.

⁹⁹ This later material is taken largely from a speech which Fiske made on May 13, 1895, in New York City, at a dinner given in his honor by John Spencer Clark. See Fiske, "The Part Played by Infancy in the Evolution of Man," *Writings*, XXII, 96 n. 1.

prior to Copernicus," because it viewed him as the terminal end of evolutionary events.

If at the end of the long history of evolution comes man, if this whole secular process has been going on to produce this supreme object, it does not much matter what kind of a cosmical body he lives on. He is put back into the old position of theological importance, and in a much more intelligent way than in the old days when he was supposed to occupy the centre of the universe. We are enabled to say that while there is no doubt of the evolutionary process going on throughout countless ages which we know nothing about, yet in the one case where it is brought home to us we spell out an intelligible story, and we do find things working along up to man as a terminal fact in the whole process.¹⁰⁰

When Fiske joined this conclusion that man is the terminus of the process of evolution to his observations about the development of the higher psychical attributes of man, he was led to the inference that the meaning within the process is to be found in the development of these attributes which make for a fuller life for man. He was ready now to call these attributes the "higher spiritual attributes," and to point out that not only is evolution in harmony with religion, but that two other facts are also true. The conviction of man that religion is a "fit and worthy occupation" is a valid conviction; attention to and development of these "spiritual attributes" is a sound philosophical principle. Second, if our reading of evolution is true, then "some of the assumptions which underlie every system of religion must be true." When man has been practicing religion he has in a real sense laid hold on reality.¹⁰¹ The future development of the race will be in the direction of these higher attributes, the limits of which are "well-nigh infinite." The true meaning of history, read through the legend written by evolution, is thus revealed most clearly in the phenomenon of infancy. "From of old," wrote Fiske, "we have heard the admonition, 'Except ye be as babes, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.'" Because we have been babes, the kingdom is now a possibility: a

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, XXII, 107-108.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, XXII, 109.

kingdom of ethical significance, one characterized by self-sacrifice and devotion.¹⁰² For society this means that the Kingdom of God is a real possibility.

The future is lighted for us with the radiant colours of hope. Strife and sorrow shall disappear. Peace and love shall reign supreme. The dream of poets, the lesson of priest and prophet, the inspiration of the great musician, is confirmed in the light of modern knowledge; and as we gird ourselves up for the work of life, we may look forward to the time when in the truest sense the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever, king of kings and lord of lords.¹⁰³

For individual men the future is no less bright. That energy which wells up in us as consciousness and is even now growing into those higher affections of a spiritual nature, is the same energy as that ultimate divine energy which lies at the root of all life. The belief that at some period in the evolution of humanity this divine spark might acquire "sufficient concentration and steadiness to survive the wreck of material forms and endure forever," seems to be indicated. Such an outcome is "no more than the fit climax to a creative work which has been ineffably beautiful and marvellous in all its myriad stages."¹⁰⁴

Fiske thought that this optimistic conclusion, particularly as it concerned man's social destiny, could receive support from a proper interpretation of human history. His major historical works were all written under this conviction. As a young man he had hoped to write a comprehensive history which would demonstrate the conviction. His actual writings were limited to American history. What he found to be true in this specific period, however, he felt was true of the whole. "History," he wrote, "is philosophy teaching by example,"¹⁰⁵ and he believed that the same philosophy was taught in the separate scenes and in the panorama. Our examination of his historical writings will

¹⁰² *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 162.

¹⁰³ *The Destiny of Man, Writings*, XXI, 84.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, XXI, 83.

¹⁰⁵ "The Famine of 1770 in Bengal," *Writings*, XVIII, 250.

serve a twofold purpose. It will show how he sought to extend the principles of "cosmic evolution" into the specific interpretation of man's history. In this sense his works serve as his contribution to the inductive verification of his theory. In the second place, our study of these writings will give additional evidence of Fiske's own intuitive beliefs. These books are not the work of a purely objective historian. He wrote history, not to chronicle events, but to teach his philosophy, and in his writings we hear the confident voice of one who knows he will find in his historical analysis proof of the validity of man's aspirations.

III. AN INTERPRETATION OF AMERICAN HISTORY

One of Fiske's contemporaries wrote that the great merit of his historical works was "that of making the reader feel that, in a political society like ours, all honest and intelligent effort toward reform is '*worth while.*'"¹⁰⁶ This value, which Fiske found in American political history and which he was so gifted in interpreting for others, was, for him, a specific part of the larger value which was to be found in the evolutionary development of man.

... the political history of the American people can rightly be understood only when it is studied in connection with that general process of political evolution which has been going on from the earliest times, and of which it is itself one of the most important and remarkable phases. . . . As the town-meetings of New England are lineally descended from the village assemblies of the early Aryans; as our huge federal union was long ago foreshadowed in the little leagues of Greek cities and Swiss cantons; so the great political problem which we are (thus far successfully) solving is the same problem upon which all civilized people have been working since civilization began.¹⁰⁷

This task had been the dual one of insuring "peaceful con-

¹⁰⁶ John Graham Brooks, "John Fiske," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* XXIV, 177. Cf. the editorial, "John Fiske," *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXXVIII (Aug. 1901), 283: "His usefulness as an historian lay largely in his ability to bring home to the average American a conviction of the continuity of the national life, and the significance of the crises that attended the various stages of its development."

¹⁰⁷ Fiske, *American Political Ideas, Viewed from the Standpoint of Universal History* (New York and London, 1902 [c. 1885]), preface, p. 6.

certed action throughout the whole, without infringing upon local and individual freedom in the parts." The success and failure of any nation was to be rated according to its ability to attain this end.¹⁰⁸

In 1891, when Fiske had completed the writing of *The Discovery of America*, he wrote that for a true perspective of the place of America in history, we needed to "form a mental picture of that strange world of savagery and barbarism to which civilized Europeans were for the first time introduced in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in their voyages along the African coast, into the Indian and Pacific oceans and across the Atlantic."¹⁰⁹ The reason for this was to be found in the fact that the ancient society of America had more instructive lessons to teach than any other primitive society. Its isolation from the rest of the world "for probably more than fifty thousand years," meant that when Columbus discovered America the societal state here was little advanced beyond the point which European and Mediterranean societies had reached several thousand years earlier.¹¹⁰ Aboriginal America, therefore, presented a veritable storehouse of information by the use of which the development of civilization could be traced. Fiske pointed out that he had not always held this position. Prior to 1876 he had held that the most fruitful avenue to the study of American history was through a study of the Aryan groups and institutions. This study was still considered to be of value, but after 1876 he was convinced that its chief value was supplementary. Exclusive attention to European and Asiatic developments left too many unbridged gaps in the history of civilization.¹¹¹

Fiske accepted the general classification of the successive stages of culture which Lewis H. Morgan had set down in his work on *Ancient Society*: savagery, barbarism, and civilization.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Idem*.

¹⁰⁹ *The Discovery of America*, preface, *Writings*, I, xi.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, xii, xiv.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, xii, xiii.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, I, 29-45. Cf. Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society or Researches into*

Starting with what he called an undeniable observation that "portions of the human family have existed in a state of savagery, other portions in a state of barbarism, and still other portions in a state of civilization," Morgan had attempted to show that these three conditions were connected in a "natural as well as necessary sequence of progress."¹¹³ To facilitate this attempt he had divided each of the two lower ethnic periods into three classes each, each division corresponding to a status attained by man.

I. Lower status of savagery—the prehistoric period when man lived in a restricted habitat and lived on a diet of fruits and nuts.

II. Middle status of savagery—beginning with the discovery of the art of catching fish, the use of fire, etc.

III. Upper status of savagery—beginning with the invention of the bow and arrow.

IV. Lower status of barbarism—beginning with the invention of the art of pottery.

V. Middle status of barbarism—beginning with the domestication of animals in the Eastern hemisphere and with the cultivation of maize and plants by irrigation, and the use of adobe-brick and stone in the Western hemisphere.

VI. Upper status of barbarism—beginning with the invention of the process of smelting iron ore, the use of iron tools, etc.

VII. Status of civilization—beginning with the invention of a phonetic alphabet, with the use of writing.¹¹⁴

Fiske accepted this classification with the reservation that like "all wide generalizations of this sort the case is liable to be somewhat unduly simplified."¹¹⁵ With this caution to guide us, however, the scale did provide an adequate method of classifying ancient culture. Applying it to ancient America, he found that the people in the Western hemisphere "present every gradation

the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization (New York, 1907 [c. 1877]), pp. 3-4, 9-12.

¹¹³ Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13. Cf. Fiske, *Writings*, I, 32-38.

¹¹⁵ Fiske, *Writings*, I, 39.

in social life during three ethnical periods,—the upper period of savagery, and the lower and middle periods of barbarism.”¹¹⁶ The oldest European tradition, on the other hand, extended back only through the upper period of barbarism. Exclusive attention to the phases of progress in the Old World, therefore, resulted in an abrupt and sudden demarcation between civilized and uncivilized life. The American scene presented a more complete picture from which the pattern of progress could be discerned.¹¹⁷

After a brief examination of the American scene, Fiske came to a conclusion which he had already reached in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*. The one characteristic of ancient society that was most instructive in exhibiting the gulf between “barbarous society” and “civilized society” was to be found in the development of domestic relations.¹¹⁸ He referred again to his theory of the prolongation of infancy and concluded that aboriginal America bore witness to the assertion that “the development of the family and the increase of mental plasticity” were the two formative factors in development. Thus, while we are led to conclude that, in ancient America, the people and their culture were indigenous, their development followed the same pattern as that of the Old World. The major difference was that the former progressed less rapidly than the latter. “Ancient America . . . was a much more archaic world than the world of Europe and Asia, and presented in the time of Columbus forms of society that on the shores of the Mediterranean had been outgrown before the city of Rome was built.”¹¹⁹

The date of the contact between these two developing societies was 1492. Fiske considered a number of “narratives of explorations” of America prior to this date, giving considerable attention to the stories of the Norsemen, but concluded that all such “pre-Columbian voyages were quite barren of results of historic im-

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 43. The upper period of barbarism—the stage of the Greeks in the Homeric poems and of the Germans in the time of Caesar—had not been reached in aboriginal America (*ibid.*, I, 37 f.).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 43-44.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 62.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 170.

portance."¹²⁰ He adhered strictly to a test for the historic importance of an event which was constituted almost exclusively of the results which the event had in shaping the developing society. To all intents and purposes, therefore, America was really not "discovered" until there were present certain influences which had enduring effects of one kind or another. On the other hand, the "discovery of America" was really the result of a process that extended far back into the past. The real test was that of evolutionary connection.

The Discovery of America may be regarded in one sense as a unique event, but it must likewise be regarded as a long and multifarious process. The unique event was the crossing of the Sea of Darkness in 1492. It established a true and permanent contact between the eastern and western halves of our planet, and brought together the two streams of human life that had flowed in separate channels ever since the Glacial period. . . . On the other hand, when we regard the Discovery as a long and multifarious process, it is only by a decision more or less arbitrary that we can say when it began or when it ended. It emerged from a complex group of facts and theories, and was accomplished through a multitude of enterprises in all quarters of the globe. We cannot understand its beginnings without paying due heed to the speculations of Claudius Ptolemy at Alexandria in the second century of our era, and to the wanderings of Rubruquis in Tartary in the thirteenth; nor can we describe its consummation without recalling to memory the motives and results of cruises in the Malay archipelago and journeys through the snows of Siberia.¹²¹

The work of Columbus had been to contribute the discovery of some "new islands and a bit of Terra Firma of more or less doubtful commercial value." The work of grouping these items into an "organic whole" was accomplished by the "companions and successors to Columbus," until the discovery of America was an established part of the developing civilization of man.¹²² The consideration of the part played by an particular explorer in the

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 292.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, III, 387-388. "Properly regarded, the Discovery of America was not a single event, but a very gradual process. It was not like a case of special creation, for it was a case of evolution, and the voyage of 1492 was simply the most decisive and epoch-marking incident in that evolution" (*ibid.*, II, 134).

¹²² *Ibid.*, II, 212.

discovery of America was to be made in relation to his contribution to the forming of the whole. For example, the explorations of the Cabots were "highly interesting in their relations to the subsequent work of English colonization";¹²³ "the first fateful note that heralded the coming English supremacy was sounded when John Cabot's tiny craft sailed out from the Bristol channel on a bright May morning in 1497."¹²⁴ But in the "history of the discovery of America" these voyages occupied at best only a very subordinate place.

The causal sequence of events, from Columbus to Magellan, which brought out the fact that a New World had been discovered, would not have been altered if the voyages of the Cabots had never been made. It was only by voyages to the south that the eyes of the Europeans could be opened to the real significance of what was going on. . . . The later voyages of Vespuccius began to give a new meaning to the work of Columbus, and prepared the way for the grand consummation by Magellan.¹²⁵

The later work of the Spaniards, interpreted according to this principle, presented a twofold contribution, one positive and the other negative. On the positive side, Fiske listed the work of Cortes in Mexico. Granting that the "missionary and crusading spirit" of the Spaniards had the tendency to allow zeal to overcome prudence, Fiske insisted that "There can be no doubt that, after making all allowances, the Spaniards did introduce a better state of society into Mexico than they found there."¹²⁶ The same conclusion was reached when he applied the test to the work of the Pizarros in Peru, and of Bartolomé de Las Casas in the West Indies and Central America.¹²⁷ On the negative side, the Spanish policy of crushing out individualism, as exemplified in the Inquisition, led to a "dull and rigid conservatism" which bore fruit in "general stagnation and lack of enterprise."¹²⁸ This devotion to "checking the activities of the human mind"

¹²³ *Ibid.*, II, 238.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 213-214. Cf. *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors, Writings*, IV,

^{13-14.}

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 239-240.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 199 ff., 272 ff.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 89.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 402-403.

paved the way in the northern part of the hemisphere, where that policy (employed by the French and Spanish alike) came into conflict with the more flexible English policy, for the triumph of the latter. The English policy of giving "full play to individualism" molded a race of men with "flexible and self-reliant intelligence" and eventuated in the triumph of English institutions in northern America. The record so written was a vindication both of the stated principle of evolution of society and of the inherent soundness of English civilization. The struggle for the possession of America "has revealed the superior vitality of institutions and methods that first came to maturity in England and now seem destined to shape the future of the world."¹²⁹

It was upon this note that the next volume in the series began. The English colonization of Virginia marked the opening of a new arena in which the "world of Shakespeare . . . was to gain indefinite power of future expansion." The "deepest significance of the discovery of America" was to be found in the widening opportunities for mankind which this triumph of English ideas in the New World provided.¹³⁰ In this work on *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors* Fiske began the central work of several volumes which were to cover the period from the discovery of America to the Revolution. The immediate volume was designed to "follow the main stream of causation from the time of Raleigh to the time of Dinwiddie, from its sources down to its absorption into a mightier stream."¹³¹ Fiske followed, somewhat in detail, the origin, growth, and fortunes of the London Company until its charter was revoked in 1624. This period he referred to as the period of the "embryonic development of Virginia." The London Company had done its work so well, however, that the "severing

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 405-406.

¹³⁰ *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors, Writings*, IV, 12-13.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, IV, viii. Not all of the proposed volumes were written. Only slight attention is given in the series to the colonies south of the Virginia boundary in 1753 (that is, to the Carolinas and Georgia) and to Maryland on the north. The volumes which were published were devoted to New England, New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania, and to the French settlements west of the Alleghanies.

of the umbilical cord" in 1624 left the colony "stronger and more self-reliant than before." The pattern of development was unfolding and its direction was unmistakable.

In the unfolding of these events there is poetic beauty and grandeur as the purpose of Infinite Wisdom reveals itself in its cosmic process, slowly but inexorably, hastening not but resting not, heedless of the clashing aims and discordant cries of short-sighted mortals, sweeping their tiny efforts into its majestic current, and making all contribute to the fulfilment of God's will.¹³²

Of particular significance during this period was the pattern of the promise and subsequent revocation of the rights of self-government given to Virginia. The provisions of the patents of Gilbert and Raleigh granted an "unequivocal acknowledgement of the rights of self-government," as long as such government was in accord with English principles and did not deny allegiance to England. It was this right that was to be denied two centuries after it had been granted to Raleigh's colonists. "Gilbert and Raleigh demanded and Elizabeth granted in principle just what Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams demanded and George III. refused to concede."¹³³ The recognition of this was important to Fiske's presentation because it enabled him to interpret the American Revolution in a way which did not deny the continuity of the causal link.

The period of the royal governors in Virginia was the period of "schooling" for the revolution and that which was to follow it. The "British imperial interference with American local self-government—in Virginia as in Massachusetts—provided the stress in which the manhood of the colonists was developed." "The habit of parliamentary discussion" produced in Massachusetts a mass of people endowed with the spirit of political liberty; the Virginian policy of "concentrating the administration of local affairs in the hands of a few county families," was instrumental in producing "skilful and vigorous leadership."¹³⁴ The period

¹³² *Ibid.*, IV, 228.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 51.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, IV, 36.

from 1676 to 1776 was the "century of political education." Amid the circumstances of these years there "came into existence the necessary conditions for the establishment of political independence and the formulation of our Federal Union."¹³⁵ The end of the period when we can speak of Virginia history by itself was determined by the movements of the French west of the Alleghanies. In 1753 Governor Dinwiddie commissioned George Washington to cross the mountains, "to negotiate with Indian tribes, and to warn the advancing Frenchmen to trespass no farther upon English territory." The first contact between Frenchmen and Englishmen in the Alleghanies marked the point where "the stream of Virginia history becomes an inseparable portion of the majestic stream in which flows the career of our Federal Union."¹³⁶

The volume on *The Beginnings of New England* is of value for our discussion primarily because Fiske set down in this work a discussion of his theory of the development of political systems. The historical material treated covers the period from the beginning of the Puritan exodus from England to the revolution of 1689 (the overthrow of Governor Edmund Andros). But in tracing the principles at work in this period, Fiske found it necessary to preface the work with a discussion of the rise of the English form of government. The history of political systems, he wrote, is the story of the exceedingly slow process of "development and extinction."¹³⁷ In order to understand the processes which have "shifted the seat of empire until the prominent part played nineteen centuries ago by Rome and Alexandria . . . has been at length assumed by London and New York," we must acquire a knowledge of the "drifts and tendencies of human thought and feeling and action from the earliest age to the time in which we live."

In the widest sense the subject of political history is the description of the processes by which, under favourable circumstances, innumerable . . .

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, V, 127.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 467-468.

¹³⁷ *The Beginnings of New England, Writings*, VI, 6.

primitive tribes have become welded together into mighty nations, with elevated standards of morals and manners, with wide and varied experience, sustaining life and ministering to human happiness by elaborate arts and sciences, and putting a curb upon warfare by limiting its scope, diminishing its cruelty, and interrupting it by intervals of peace.¹³⁸

With this in mind, Fiske listed three ways of "nation making" which exhibit the development of political history: the Oriental method of "conquest without incorporation"; the Roman method of "conquest with incorporation, but without representation"; and the English method of "conquest with incorporation and representation."¹³⁹ The volume on New England was designed to be an accounting of one of the landmarks in the transition from the Roman to the English method.

In these gigantic processes of evolution we cannot mark beginnings or endings by years, hardly even by centuries. But among the significant events which prophesied the final triumph of the English over the Roman idea, perhaps the most significant—the one which marks most incisively the dawning of a new era—was the migration of English Puritans across the Atlantic Ocean, to repeat in a new environment and on a grander scale of dimensions the work which their forefathers had wrought in Britain.¹⁴⁰

The denial of this great principle of political government (the "combining of sovereignty with liberty, indestructible union of the whole with indestructible life in the parts"), in Massachusetts and in Virginia, set the stage for the revolution. The "spirit of 1776" was foreshadowed in the revolt of 1689 against the tyranny which threatened the existence of the principle of such "fundamental importance to mankind."¹⁴¹

The next two works (the last two to be published), taken as a unit, were designed to trace the development of the northern colonies from 1689 to 1765. They were to be companion volumes to *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors*, and, with that work, were to prepare for the volumes on *The American Revolution*. The first of these two works, *The Dutch and Quaker Colonies in*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, VI, 9-10.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, VI, 57-58.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, 24.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 56, 347.

America, really begins with the explorations of Henry Hudson in 1607-1611. The work which this explorer started was to eventuate in the acquiring of Manhattan Island by the Dutch in 1626 and thus to provide the link between the history of the Netherlands and the Americas.¹⁴² From 1626 on, the narrative as related by Fiske is, for the most part, concerned to recount the internal struggles of the Dutch settlements and the conflicts between the Dutch and the English, the Dutch and the Indians, etc. In defense of this accounting of events which Fiske felt some historians would consider "extremely petty, almost beneath what some people call the dignity of history," he insisted that the real story of history could be found in this contemplation of "political and social phenomena on a small scale."¹⁴³ It was on this level that the real cause of the Dutch failures and English successes could be seen. This cause Fiske found in the "spontaneous expression" of free English ideas of government in the New World and in the contrasting Dutch colonial idea of government through and by a commercial company.¹⁴⁴ The lack of respect for popular liberty which the Dutch leaders exhibited in New Amsterdam marked it for failure. "The arbitrary theory of government has never flourished on the soil of the New World, and its career on Manhattan Island was one of its first and most significant failures."¹⁴⁵ The surrender of the Dutch settlement under Peter Stuyvesant to the English in 1664 marked, therefore, a significant point in the development of the American form of government. But the Dutch settlements were not without their lasting significance. It was here, said Fiske, that the element of cosmopolitanism entered American life, and with it "there was added to American national life the variety, the flexibility, the generous

¹⁴² *The Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America, Writings*, VII, 109.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, VII, 255, 256.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 254 ff. Fiske contrasted the influence of the Virginia Company and the West India Company. The self-government permitted under the former was found primarily to be the result of the transplanting of the idea of "government by primary assembly, which had not lost its vitality in rural England" (*ibid.*, VII, 259-261).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, VII, 341-342.

breadth of view, the spirit of compromise and conciliation needful to save the nation from provincialism.”¹⁴⁶

Fiske next traced the development of New York, New Jersey and surrounding areas from 1664 to 1680. In this latter year, the granting of the “West Jersey” area to the Quakers introduced a new element into the “line of causation” which was to lead to the founding of the American Union. The significance of Pennsylvania, however, was for Fiske largely the story of William Penn and his contributions. He referred to Penn as “by far the greatest among the founders of the American commonwealths,” and described the “holy experiment” as primarily a testimony to “liberty of conscience.”¹⁴⁷ He found this latter ideal reflected in the charter.

Absolute freedom of conscience was guaranteed to everybody. It was declared, in the language which to the seventeenth century seemed arrant political heresy, that governments exist for the sake of the people, and not the people for the sake of governments; and side by side with this came the equally novel doctrine that in legislating for the punishment of criminals, the reformation of the criminal is a worthier object than the wreaking of vengeance.¹⁴⁸

The liberal approach to government in Pennsylvania was the cause, according to Fiske, of the influx of Palatinate German and Scotch-Irish immigrants into the colony. This, in turn, accounted for the rapid growth of Pennsylvania and prepared the colony for its significant place in the development of America: Pennsylvania became the “chief centre of diffusion of the people who became afterward the pioneers of the democratic West.”¹⁴⁹ The last chapter in Fiske’s work was a recounting of the numerous “sects” which found in Pennsylvania the avenue through which they entered the life-stream of America. His conclusion showed a marked emphasis upon the importance of the religious groups

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 415.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII, 114, 115. “Uppermost in his [Penn’s] mind . . . was the hope of planting a free and self-governing community wherein his own ideal of a civil polity might be realized” (*ibid.*, VIII, 171-172).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, 178-179.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 383-384.

in the formation of the American tradition. He found in Pennsylvania the place where these "sturdy elements" were distilled into the stream which "has formed the main strength of American democracy. . . ."¹⁵⁰

The second of Fiske's last two works, *New France and New England*, was not put into its final form before his death. The material lacks, therefore, the unity of a completed work. In general, he traced the origins and developments of French colonization in America and the conflicts between the English and the French, concluding with a graphic and detailed account of the fall of Quebec. The entire account of these conflicts was seen as another example of "the strife between absolutism and individualism, between paternal government carried to the last extreme, and the spontaneous life of communities that governed themselves in town meetings."¹⁵¹

Two chapters were included by the editors of the material which seem definitely out of place in the book: Chapter V, "Witchcraft in Salem Village," and Chapter VI, "The Great Awakening." The first is really a series of case studies in the hysteria accompanying the charges of witchcraft which swept Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. Fiske's interest in the subject was found in the fact that it was a reflection of a state of superstition out of which men were developing. ". . . there is no monument more conspicuous than the Salem Witchcraft to mark the remote and fast receding side of the gulf which the human mind has traversed in these two centuries."¹⁵² The chapter on the Great Awakening is primarily an account of the issue which developed out of the "Halfway Covenant" proposal in New England Congregationalism. The most significant thing about the chapter is the objectivity with which Fiske treated the orthodoxy against which he had revolted so decidedly earlier in his life and of which he had been so caustically critical. His ap-

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII, 414.

¹⁵¹ *New France and New England, Writings*, IX, 233.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, IX, 196.

praisal of the Awakening laid stress upon the "inwardness" which it fostered.

With regard to the general effect of the Awakening, in spite of the extravagances with which it was here and there attended, it certainly did much to heighten and deepen the religious life in New England. As compared with the old days of the Halfway Covenant, the new doctrine of conversion was like an uplifting of the soul to better things. The religious thought of the seventeenth century was in danger of losing its life among dry logical formulas. It needed to be touched with emotion, and that was what the Great Awakening accomplished. . . . If we were able thoroughly to sift all relevant facts I think we should conclude that in producing the tenderness of soul in which the nineteenth century so far surpassed the eighteenth, a considerable share must be assigned to the preaching and self-searchings, the prayers and tears, the jubilation and praise, of the Great Awakening.¹⁵³

In the two-volume work on the Revolution, Fiske's attention was centered mainly in the relating of the campaigns and battles which he considered to be crucial in the struggle for independence. The work is valuable as a part of his interpretative history in that he attempted to show that back of the military struggle there was no "essential antagonism of interests or purposes between the British and American peoples." The Revolution was seen as essentially conservative in character. "Its object was not the acquisition of new liberties, but the preservation of old ones."¹⁵⁴ The tyranny of George III, which Fiske insisted was "largely due to the exigencies of the political situation in which he found himself," sought to overthrow those principles which were the heritage of England as well as of America.¹⁵⁵ The victory at Yorktown was only a logical conclusion to the fight for that political liberty which was not only the genius of the English civilization, but also the high-water mark of political evolution.

In America the military victory marked the opening of the "Critical Period." Was freedom from tyranny to result in a

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, IX, 231-232.

¹⁵⁴ *The American Revolution, Writings*, XI, 350-351.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 51.

“single powerful and pacific federal union,” or was it to end in the gradual decline of small and separate communities, “wasting their strength and moral tone by perpetual warfare, like the states of ancient Greece, or by perpetual preparation for warfare, like the nations of modern Europe?”¹⁵⁶ This question was finally answered in favor of “union” in 1788 with the adoption of the Constitution. The period between the end of the Revolution and 1788 marked the “turning-point in the development of political society in the western hemisphere.”¹⁵⁷ During this period the “alternatives of future welfare or misery for mankind” were confronted and the choice made. The framing and adoption of the Constitution provided the vantage point from which the political destiny of mankind could be viewed. That document, seen in the light of its origins, was a splendid example of “evolution from precedents.”¹⁵⁸ It stood as a supreme monument to that ever-increasing attempt of man to secure “permanent concert of action without sacrificing local independence of action”—to attain “rigidity” without sacrificing “fluidity.”¹⁵⁹ As we look beyond it to the future, we see in it an index of the ultimate pacific union of all mankind.

. . . the history of human progress politically will continue in the future to be what it has been in the past,—the history of the successive union of groups of men into larger and more complex aggregates. As this process goes on, it may after many more ages of political experience become apparent that there is really no reason, in the nature of things, why the whole of mankind should not constitute politically one huge federation,—each little group managing its local affairs in entire independence, but relegating all questions of international interest to the decision of one central tribunal supported by the public opinion of the entire human race.¹⁶⁰

The “American segment” of man’s political development was, therefore, an extremely important segment. As a part of the whole it shared in the evolutionary development of man, and

¹⁵⁶ *The Critical Period of American History, Writings*, XII, ix.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XII, viii.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, 264.

¹⁵⁹ *American Political Ideas*, p. 108.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

ultimately of the cosmos itself. The primary significance of this segment, however, was to be found in the indication that the extension of the system there revealed would lead eventually to the world society toward which "creation had been tending." The historical facts, he wrote, confirm our faith in the "ultimate triumph of good over evil," prophetic of the day when the world can be said "to have become truly Christian."¹⁶¹

This conclusion gives evidence of three convictions which Fiske held throughout his life. The first was the conviction which concerned the inherent nature of the society which was being produced. Whatever ethical pessimism might be read from the cosmic process by Huxley and others, Fiske was convinced that history was finally the story of "the triumph of good over evil." Historical process and ethical progress were to be identified. The evidences of this conviction were present at least as early as his criticism of Buckle's failure to take into account the "moral factor" in man's development. The conviction was strengthened in later years by Fiske's analysis of the evolutionary process of which history was a part. As he came to find in evolution an emphasis upon the preservation and development of man's "higher psychical attributes," including the ethical attributes, he was even more convinced that the ultimate development of the "good society" was "according to the nature of things."

This suggests the second conviction. Fiske believed that the evolutionary interpretation of historical facts confirmed the faith of man in the nature of history. That which man had intuitively held to be true could now be demonstrated according to what Fiske believed to be the best application of the science of his day. The vision of mankind of a nobler society on earth had a double warranty. The visions themselves, psychologically considered, were the results of long ages of adjustments to events, and reflected this in their aspirations for a wider and wider environment to which future adjustments could be made. In the second place, the indication that these visions, as products of the functions

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

of man's highest attributes, were a part of that to which creation had been tending, gave to these ideals the stamp of authenticity.

The third conviction consisted of Fiske's identification of the higher ethical society indicated by evolution and the Kingdom of God, which was the object of the Christian faith. On the one hand this necessitated a reduction of the content of the Christian belief to an ethical society on earth and in time. On the other hand, it did suggest that, when the Christian hope was so limited, strong "scientific" support could be marshaled in favor of its validity. It is not without significance that Fiske made this identification. At the very least it suggests that he approached the interpretation of history primarily as a religious thinker. A part of the creed of the Cosmist was the faith that the noblest aspirations of man were true to what God was doing in history.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COSMIC GOD

THE UNDERSTANDING of Fiske's evolutionary interpretation of religion requires as approach which, first of all, recognizes the important position which his early convictions about the nature of reality, man and his destiny, occupied in his thought. Just as history was "philosophy teaching by example," so the study of religion exhibited the inner meaning of that philosophy. Cosmic Theism provided, for Fiske, a description of the nature of reality, specified the conditions for the knowledge of ultimate reality, laid a philosophical basis for ethics, and illumined the destiny of man. He did not claim that Cosmic Theism was a new position, born of new insights which the nineteenth century scientific studies had provided. Rather, the "cosmic" approach to religion merely served to elaborate and to clarify the position which he believed to be that of normative Christianity.¹ The value of this evolutionary interpretation of religion was to be found in its more adequate way of expressing those basic tenets which the religious man had always believed were truly descriptive of things as they are. The "living garment of God,"

¹ "The view which I have ventured to designate as 'cosmic theism' is no invention of mine; in its most essential features it has been entertained by some of the profoundest thinkers of Christendom in ancient and modern times, from Clement of Alexandria to Lessing and Goethe and Schleiermacher" (*The Idea of God, Writings, XXI*, 98-99).

once so dimly seen, had, through the medium of this new insight, become more and more clearly visible.²

Fiske once referred to his philosophy as the attempt "to bring about a harmony between human knowledge and human aspirations."³ The first step in establishing this harmony was to show the compatibility of the conclusions of the cosmic philosopher and the theistic convictions of religious belief. This essentially was the problem of specifying "what kind of theism" was congenial to the results yielded by a study of the phenomena in which the Power behind the universe was manifested. The establishment of this definition would then permit an intelligent discussion of the possibilities of the knowledge of this Power by man. In tracing the development of Fiske's thought in these two areas of metaphysics and epistemology we shall discover a gradual change in his attitude toward positive assertions in both areas. His thought moved from the Spencerian position of agnosticism to a more truly theistic attitude. The motivating force behind the change in both areas, however, was his confidence in his intuitive convictions about the validity of man's religious consciousness.

I. THE NATURE OF GOD

One of Fiske's favorite quotations was Matthew Arnold's definition of God as "an Eternal Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." The twofold assertion implied in the definition, Fiske said, was the point of basic agreement among all religions, and he accepted it as the basis upon which he would erect his own philosophical statement of the nature of God. "The widest and deepest truth which the study of nature can disclose to us," he wrote, is "that there exists a Power to which no limit in time or space is conceivable, and that all the phenomena of the universe . . . are manifestations of this infinite and eternal Power."⁴ In 1868, in a criticism of Lessing's "too-simple"

² *Ibid.*, XXI, 118. ". . . each act of scientific explanation but reveals an opening through which shines the glory of the Eternal Majesty" (*ibid.*, XXI, 168).

³ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 177.

⁴ Fiske, "Evolution and Religion," *Writings*, XIX, 271 ff.

theology, Fiske was already insisting that any philosophy of religion must take into account the “dark side of the shield,” which “looking out upon infinity,” was written over with “hieroglyphics the meaning of which we can never know.”

It is the consciousness that there is about us an omnipresent Power, in which we live and move and have our being, eternally manifesting itself throughout the whole range of natural phenomena, which has ever disposed men to be religious, and lured them on in the vain effort to construct adequate theological systems. . . . I believe that this restless yearning, vague enough in the description, yet recognizable by all who, communing with themselves or with nature, have felt it,—this constant seeking for what cannot be found, this persistent knocking at gates which, when opened, but reveal others yet to be passed, constitutes an element which no adequate theory of religion can overlook.⁵

In the years that followed he became more and more interested in the attempt to define this “Unknowable” in theistic terms, and, as the above quotation suggests, to specify the path of knowledge which led to this expanding definition. The first steps in this direction were taken in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*. The first hint of the direction in which his thought was moving is found in his examination of Comte’s assertion that “the progress of human thought, with reference to the unknown Cause or causes of phenomena, can be regarded as divisible into stages.”⁶ He agreed that Comte had correctly observed that the expressions which men had used in defining man’s relations to this Cause or these causes had developed. The confirmation of this was “written on every page of history.” He concluded, however, that this observation was “but one side of the truth.” The other side, which Comte had not seen, was “that from first to last there is no change in the nature of the psychological process” through which man characterized this relationship. The “hidden Power underlying and sustaining the world of phenomena” could no more be ignored in the last step than it could in the first one.⁷

⁵ “Nathan the Wise,” *Writings*, XVIII, 212-213.

⁶ *Cosmic Philosophy*, *Writings*, XIII, 250.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 252-253.

This meant that the "final scientific conception of a uniformly conditioned force" could not be framed without postulating "an unconditioned Power existing independently of consciousness."

Thus the three stages disappear entirely, and the three terminal conceptions which are alleged as distinctively characteristic of the stages are seen to be identical. The God of the monotheist, the Nature of the metaphysician, and the Absolute Being which science is compelled to postulate, differ only as symbols differ which stand for the same eternal fact.⁸

The problem which Fiske faced as a result of this rejection of Comte's stages was that of finding some new way of describing the changes which had occurred in man's representations of this Power. His solution was to regard the changes, not as "three successive or superposed processes," but as "one continuous process which . . . is best described as a continuous process of *deanthropomorphization*."⁹ "Philosophic evolution" was a process of integration, in thought, of causal agencies—a process accompanied by a decreasing tendency to ascribe anthropomorphic attributes to the resulting integrated Cause. The last important element of anthropomorphism which remained in the "more refined conception of theism" was the doctrine of final causes. The retention of this doctrine had led to the insistence that the scientific study of the universe relied upon the prior detection of the end, the "penetration of the design" according to which all things exist.¹⁰

In 1874 Fiske thought that this position, and the postulation of the "quasi-human God" which it necessitated, were useless. Evidences of design, while they might safely be deduced from known laws, could not be employed as "stepping-stones to the discovery of new truths." God was to be accepted as the "cause of all things, but the explanation of nothing."¹¹ Further, the very act of conceiving of the Deity in anthropomorphic terms

⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII, 255.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII, 260. By "deanthropomorphization" Fiske meant "the stripping off of the anthropomorphic attributes with which primeval philosophy clothed the unknown Power which is manifested in phenomena."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 186-187.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 189.

logically resulted in the destruction of the idea of a God who was worthy of man's highest response.

... to represent the Deity as a person who thinks, contrives, and legislates is simply to represent him as a product of evolution. The definition of intelligence being "the continuous adjustment of specialized inner relations to specialized outer relations," it follows that to represent the Deity as intelligent is to surround Deity with an environment, and thus to destroy its infinity and its self-existence. The eternal Power whereof the web of phenomena is but the visible garment becomes degraded into a mere strand in the web of phenomena; and the Cosmos, in exchange for the loss of its infinite and inscrutable God, receives an anomalous sovereign of mythologic pedigree."¹²

The influence of Spencer's theory of the "Unknowable" is evident in this negative attitude toward the tendency to define God in anthropomorphic terms. While Fiske was conscious that the position which he advocated might be termed "covertly atheistical," he insisted that the exact reverse was true. His position, he said, resulted in "an attitude toward God more reverential than that which is assumed by those who still cling to the anthropomorphic hypothesis." The choice presented to intelligent men of the day was no longer "between an intelligent Deity and none at all." The choice now was between a "limited Deity and one that is without limit." An anthropomorphic God could not be conceived as an infinite God. "Personality and *Infinity* are terms expressive of ideas which are mutually incompatible."¹³ Faced with these alternatives, man's only intelligent choice was to admit his limitations and specify "Infinity."

Of the innumerable combinations of matter and incarnations of force which are going on within the bounds of space, we know, save a few of the simplest, those only which are confined to the surface of our little planet. And to assert that among them all there may not be forms of existence as far transcending humanity as humanity itself transcends the crystal or the seaweed, is certainly the height of unwarrantable assumption.¹⁴

¹² *Ibid.*, XVI, 206-207.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 227.

Fiske was not willing, however, to settle for this negative position alone. "Upon the religious side of philosophy as well as upon its scientific side, the mind needs some fundamental theorem with reference to which it may occupy a positive attitude."¹⁵ Was there any basis upon which such an attitude might be founded without denying the conclusions which had already been reached? Fiske thought there was. There was one theorem by the assertion of which the mind was "brought into a positive attitude of faith with reference to the Inscrutable Power manifested in the universe." On the basis of this avenue to faith a new "phase of Theism" could be established; and this new phase would be "higher and purer, because relatively truer, than the anthropomorphic phase defended by theologians."¹⁶ This "all-important theorem" was the postulation of the existence of Absolute Reality beyond the knowledge of man. Here science and religion concurred and were reconciled. The Cosmos was knowable in so far as it was manifested to our intelligence as the world of phenomena. The aggregate of phenomena, therefore, existed as such "only in relation to our intelligence. Its *esse* is *percipi*." To this extent he followed Berkeley. But, following Spencer, he had found it necessary to postulate "A Something whose existence does not depend on the presence of the percipient mind, which existed before the genesis of intelligence, and would continue to exist though all intelligence were to vanish from the scene."¹⁷ For the scientist this "Something" had been referred to as "Force"; but that term was only a symbol by which man might assert the existence and persistence of "a Power, to which no limit in time or space is conceivable, of which all phenomena, as presented in consciousness, are manifestations, but which we can know only through these manifestations."¹⁸ So stated, the theorem served for both science and religion:

. . . this formula, which presents itself as the final outcome of a purely scientific inquiry, expresses also the fundamental truth of Theism,—the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 231.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XVI, 235.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI, 232.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 237.

truth by which religious feeling is justified. The existence of God—the supreme truth asserted alike by Christianity and by inferior historic religions—is asserted with equal emphasis by that Cosmic Philosophy which seeks its data in science alone.¹⁹

Would such a Being really meet the demands of religious consciousness for an Object worthy of religious response? Would man worship an “Unknowable,” or would he be driven from the implied agnosticism of this position to the worship of that which he could know—the Comtean “Humanity?” Fiske insisted that the “Cosmic” position was the only one in which a true spirit of worship could occur. “. . . what we know is not what we worship; what we know is a matter of science; it is only when science fails, and intelligence is baffled, and the Infinite confronts us, that we cease to analyze and begin to worship.”²⁰ As science expanded the “periphery of knowledge,” constantly revealing a growing “number of points at which we meet the unknowable lying beyond,” the religious attitude would be stimulated and enriched.

Fiske saw that, on the surface at least, his proposed “Cosmic Theism” might be identified with pantheism. A deeper look would reveal, however, that the two positions were “utterly opposed.” Pantheism ignored the distinction between absolute and phenomenal existence and proceeded to identify Deity with the world of phenomena. Cosmic Theism, on the other hand, insisted upon a distinction between the two.

The “open secret,” in so far as secret, is God,—in so far as open, is the World; but in thus regarding the ever-changing universe of phenomena as the multiform revelation of a Omnipresent Power, we can in no wise identify the Power with its manifestations. . . . From first to last it has been implied that, while the universe is the manifestation of Deity, yet is Deity something more than the universe.²¹

The position which he advocated, Fiske declared, was therefore that of “Theism, in its most consistent and unqualified form.” It was a “higher theism” which rejected the unphilosophical tendency to invest God with “quasi-human intelligence and voli-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 237-238.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 244-245.

²¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 250.

tion," just as earlier monotheism had rejected the tendency to invest God with a "quasi-human body."²² In addition, Cosmic Theism exhibited the fallacy in the old Anthropomorphic Theism which sought to maintain a distinction between "natural law" and "Divine action." The tendency of modern scientific inquiry, whether working in the region of psychology or in that of transcendental physics, is to abolish this distinction, and to regard 'natural law' as merely a synonym of 'Divine action.'²³ The work of God was now seen to be orderly work and not a disruption of orderly process as the Anthropomorphist held. This meant that in each extension of scientific knowledge the sphere of God's known activity was broadened.

The Cosmist . . . foresees in every possible extension of knowledge a fresh confirmation of his faith in God, and thus recognizes no antagonism between our duty as inquirers and our duty as worshippers. . . . To him no part of the world is godless. He does not rest content with the conception of "an absentee God, sitting idle, ever since the first Sabbath, at the outside of his universe, and 'seeing it go;'" for he has learned, with Carlyle, "that this fair universe, were it in the meanest province thereof, is in very deed the stardomed City of God; that through every star, through every grass blade, and most through every living soul, the glory of a present God still beams."²⁴

The central position around which Cosmic Theism erected its theory of the nature of God, therefore, was a skepticism about the adequacy of the creature as the measure of the Creator. It could not rest content with a theory which limited the "absolutely highest form of Being" to the "highest form of Being yet experienced by man."²⁵ But even the positive assertion implied in this skepticism was not sufficient of itself to warrant a designation as "Cosmic Theism." After arriving at the conviction that "the possibilities of thought are not coextensive with the possibilities of things," Fiske went on to inquire into the "possibility of a mode of existence not limited by the conditions which limit conscious ex-

²² *Ibid.*, XVI, 251.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 257-258.

²³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 256.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 260.

istence within the narrow domain of our terrestrial experience.”²⁶ The designation of such a mode would enable an extension or correction of the symbols used to refer to the Deity.

Fiske's argument at this point, a point which marks the beginning of a philosophical position which he was to develop more fully later, returned to his earlier discussions on the relation of mind and matter. He had defined the ultimate unit of which Mind is composed as “a simple *psychical shock*, answering to that simple *physical pulsation* which is the ultimate unit of nervous action.”²⁷ The relationship between these two activities is only a relation of parallelism, and the two can never be identified. The chief force of this argument was designed to discredit a materialistic hypothesis. Logically, it would serve as well to discredit an idealistic hypothesis; that is, we cannot directly translate Matter in terms of Spirit any more than we can translate Spirit in terms of Matter. But here a new element entered the argument. Fiske accepted a Berkeleyan definition of matter as “not the occult reality, but the group of phenomena which are known as resistance, extension, colour, etc.” Our experience, therefore, is primarily a psychical experience. Man's “ideas of Matter and Motion, merely symbolic of unknowable realities, are complex states of consciousness built out of units of feelings.” The aggregate of activities called “Matter” forever remains simply the unknown correlative of its effect upon the aggregate called “Mind.”²⁸ This psychological analysis meant that “while the Inscrutable Power manifested in the world of phenomena cannot possibly be regarded as quasi-material in its nature, it may nevertheless be possibly regarded as quasi-psychical.”²⁹ Absolutely

²⁶ *Idem*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, 190-191.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 284. “The great lesson which Berkeley taught mankind was that what we call material phenomena are really the products of consciousness co-operating with some Unknown Power (not material) existing beyond consciousness. We do very well to speak of ‘matter’ in common parlance, but all that the word really means is a group of qualities which have no existence apart from our minds” (“The Unseen World,” *Writings*, XVIII, 67).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 287. “If now we proceed to the outermost verge of admissible speculation, and inquire for a moment what may perhaps be the nature of that

speaking, of course, the Unknown Reality, which is manifested under the aspects of both the psychical and the physical, cannot legitimately be defined in terms of either aspect. "We are using symbols the values of which are determined by our experiences of conditioned existence," and are correspondingly inadequate to express the characteristics of unconditioned existence. With this symbolic character of our definitions in mind, Fiske was willing to say that "in so far as the exigencies of finite thinking require us to symbolize the Infinite Power . . . , we are clearly bound to symbolize it as quasi-psychical, rather than as quasi-material." We may, speaking symbolically, say that "God is Spirit," though we cannot say that "God is Force," where Force has materialistic connotations.³⁰ This does not mean that we are now permitted to clothe the Deity with definable psychical attributes. "The moment we use the words 'intelligence' and 'volition,' we are using words which have distinct meanings, as descriptive of certain circumscribed modes of psychical activity in man and some other animals."³¹ Such usage inevitably returns us to a position close to, if not identical with, that of Anthropomorphic Theism.

It is significant, in the light of Fiske's later—and more truly theistic—position, that his emphasis in this "positive attitude" as developed in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* fell so strongly upon the psychical characterization of God. As he came to develop the implications of his theory of the evolution of man's psychical and spiritual attributes, the restrictions of "symbolism" in our portrayal of God became less and less acute and limiting. Man's characterizations of the Deity were seen to be more nearly representative of the nature of ultimate Reality.

In his essay on *The Idea of God*, which was originally given as his second address before the Concord School of Philosophy in 1885, Fiske attempted to define more completely "the kind of

Inscrutable Existence' . . . , we shall find that its intimate essence may conceivably be identifiable with the intimate essence of what we know as Mind" (*ibid.*, XVI, 283).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 288.

³¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 289.

theism which I have tried to present as compatible with the doctrine of evolution.”³² His position had not changed, he said; his only purpose was to clarify that which had been set down in his earlier major work. That position he restated in his preface as the only alternative to atheism or pantheism:

... we may hold that the world of phenomena is intelligible only when regarded as the multiform manifestation of an Omnipresent Energy that is in some way—albeit in a way quite above our finite comprehension—anthropomorphic or quasi-personal. There is a true objective reasonableness in the universe; its events have an orderly progression, and, so far as those events are brought sufficiently within our ken for us to generalize them exhaustively, their progression is toward a goal that is recognizable by human intelligence; . . . it is indeed but imperfectly that we can describe the dramatic tendency in the succession of events, but we can see enough to assure us of the fundamental fact that there is such a tendency; and this tendency is the objective aspect of that which, when regarded on its subjective side, we call Purpose. Such a theory of things is Theism. It recognizes an Omnipresent Energy, which is none other than the living God.³³

It was this theistic position to which Fiske subscribed in 1885. The core of his argument centered in a re-evaluation of two ideas: the real distinction between Anthropomorphic and Cosmic Theism, and the teleological inferences which had been introduced as a result of his studies in *The Destiny of Man* in 1884. This latter element, Fiske admitted, was “new” in the sense that he had not explicitly stated it in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*. But he insisted that it was present implicitly in the arguments of the earlier work. In his criticism of Paley’s teleological argument in that major work he had written: “the wondrous process of evolution . . . [is] itself the working out of a mighty Teleology of which our finite understandings can fathom but the scantiest rudiments.”³⁴ At the time when this was written, said Fiske, “while the whole momentum of my thought carried me to the conviction that it must be so, I was not yet able to indicate how

³² *The Idea of God*, preface, *Writings*, XXI, 98.

³³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 93-94.

³⁴ *Cosmic Philosophy*, *Writings*, XVI, 223-224.

it is so, and I accordingly left the subject with this brief and inadequate hint."³⁵ Between 1874 and 1885 he had come to see "how it is so," the key to the insight being a new appreciation of man's place in the universe.

This conclusion as to the implications of the doctrine of evolution concerning Man's place in Nature supplies the element wanting in the theistic theory set forth in "Cosmic Philosophy,"—the teleological element. It is profoundly true that a theory of things may seem theistic or atheistic in virtue of what it says of Man, no less than in virtue of what it says of God. The craving for a final cause is so deeply rooted in human nature that no doctrine of theism which fails to satisfy it can seem other than lame and ineffective.³⁶

The first hint of this developing "new appreciation" after *Cosmic Philosophy* was written appeared in the essay "The Unseen World," which was written in the following year (1875). The essay was designed as an argument for the possibility of immortality, but it also laid the groundwork of a theistic argument which was based upon the study of the developing psychical faculties of man rather than upon what is usually accepted as phenomenal, scientific facts. Fiske did not extend the argument to a positive assertion about the "unseen world"; his concern here was to establish the fact that certain opinions about that world *might* be true.

Since our ability to conceive anything is limited by the extent of our experience, and since human experience is very far from being infinite, it follows that there may be, and in all probability is, an immense region of existence in every way as real as the region which we know, yet concerning which we cannot form the faintest rudiment of a conception. Any hypothesis relating to such a region of existence is not only not disproved by the total failure of evidence in its favour, but the total failure of evidence does not raise the slightest *prima facie* presumption against its validity.³⁷

Fiske combined this conclusion with his earlier arguments about the necessity of conceiving of the nature of the Absolute

³⁵ *The Idea of God*, preface, *Writings*, XXI, 102.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XXI, 101-102.

³⁷ "The Unseen World," *Writings*, XVIII, 64.

Power as psychical rather than as material and derived a strong "inference" concerning the reality of the spiritual world: "We are led to the inference that what we call the material world is but the manifestation of infinite Deity to our finite minds. Obviously, on this view, Matter . . . is simply the orderly phantasmagoria; and God and the Soul . . . are the only conceptions that answer to real existences."³⁸ The anthropomorphism involved here was inevitable. Words gain meaning from human experience, and "hence of necessity carry anthropomorphic implications. But we cannot help this. We must think with the symbols with which experience has furnished us." The reason which Fiske gave in explanation of this new emphasis is significant in the interpretation of his whole philosophical position. His early "love of mankind" was reasserting itself:

. . . there does seem to be so little that is even intellectually satisfying in the awful picture which science shows us, of giant worlds concentrating out of nebulous vapour, developing with prodigious waste of energy into theatres of all that is grand and sacred in spiritual endeavour, clashing and exploding again into dead vapour-balls, only to renew the same toilful process without end,—a senseless bubble-play of Titan forces, with life, love, and aspiration brought forth only to be extinguished. The human mind, however "scientific" its training, must often recoil from the conclusion that this is all; and there are moments when one passionately feels that this cannot be all. . . . at such times one feels that the profoundest answer which science can give to our questionings is but a superficial answer after all. At these moments, when the world seems fullest of beauty, one feels more strongly that it is but the harbinger of something else,—that the ceaseless play of phenomena is no mere sport of Titans, but an orderly scene, with its reason for existing, its

"One divine far-off event
To which the whole creation moves."³⁹

The philosopher who had sent the last sheets of his "scientific" refutation of "anthropomorphism" to the press in 1874, had, one year later, come to insist upon the possibility of the reality of those anthropomorphic aspects of life about which "science" had

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 68-69.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 74-75.

nothing to say. The motivating force in this insistence had been Fiske's continuing appreciation of the values which man intuitively asserted to be indicative of the true nature of reality. Before this conviction the Spencerian philosophy began to yield, precisely because it could not totally account for that which Fiske instinctively held to be true.

In another essay, written in that same year (1875), Fiske extended his consideration of the significance of man's "spiritual aspiration." Back of every changing theological belief, he said, "there lies something which men perennially value." This which they value is not a matter of belief; it roots deeper. "It is a matter of conduct; it is the searching after goodness,—after a higher life than the mere satisfaction of individual desires." The craving for fulness of life, present in all animals, takes on, in man, a moral significance. This "emotional tendency" is what we call religious feeling or religion. Viewed in this light, "religion is not only something that mankind is never likely to get rid of, but it is incomparably the most noble as well as the most useful attribute of humanity."⁴⁰ While Fiske was not yet ready to say it, the implications are that part of this usefulness is the positive indication which these aspirations furnish about the nature of reality.⁴¹

In 1882, in the speech given at the farewell dinner for Herbert Spencer in New York, Fiske began to emphasize the second half of the "two-fold assertion" upon which all religions agree: that there is "an eternal Power that is not ourselves, and that this Power makes for righteousness."⁴² He credited Spencer with a leading role in establishing moral beliefs and moral senti-

⁴⁰ "Draper on Science and Religion," *Writings*, XVIII, 189.

⁴¹ Cf. Josiah Royce in his introduction to *Cosmic Philosophy*, *Writings*, XIII, cxx: ". . . Fiske at this period was tending to emphasize the positive emotional aspiration, rather than the negative sense of mystery, as the essential element of religion, and through an elaboration of hypotheses which could not be proved, but which, as he felt, could be permitted (at least as spiritual exercises), was seeking to give these aspirations an ideal form, an intellectual accompaniment, which would tend to render them definite, even if it could not give them demonstrable warrant."

⁴² "Evolution and Religion," *Writings*, XIX, 272.

ment as products of evolution. The significance of this, he said, was that by so doing it is implied that such a belief or sentiment "is something which the universe through untold ages has been labouring to bring forth"; we are thus led to ascribe to it a value proportionate to "the enormous effort that it has cost to produce it." Man's moral feelings, therefore, are seen to be in harmony with reality. The distinction between "right" and "wrong" is "rooted in the deepest foundations of the universe." The eternal Power that "lives in every event of the universe," therefore, must also be "in the deepest sense the author of the moral law that should guide our lives."⁴³ Fiske made considerable use of this "moral" argument in his discussions of the theory of knowledge and of ethics. It is sufficient to note here that he was beginning to formulate a doctrine of the nature of God in terms derived from man's ethical convictions, and that there was less tendency than formerly to insist upon the symbolic character of this formulation. The hint given in "The Unseen World" in 1875, that man's aspirations *might* be an index to reality, was beginning to bear metaphysical fruit.

We have noted above that Fiske's later theistic position, as given in *The Idea of God*, involved a reconsideration of the distinction between "anthropomorphism" and "cosmism" and of the teleological inferences which his study of man suggested. We have been tracing the development of his thought in these two areas between 1874 and 1882. His second Concord lecture in 1885 provided him with the opportunity to revise his earlier theistic position in the light of these developments. Specifically, between 1874 and 1882, his attitude toward "Anthropomorphic Theism" was revised in three ways. First, he came to admit that if we are to speak of God at all, we must use symbolic terms which of necessity have anthropomorphic elements in them. Second, this anthropomorphism could be limited. While it *might* not be *adequate* to characterize God in psychical symbols, it *could* not be *accurate* to characterize him in physical symbols. Third,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XIX, 277-278.

in the light of the meaning of evolution—at least as Fiske read it—symbols which were derived from the highest psychical attributes of man seemed to be indicative of the nature of reality.

All of these conclusions found incorporation in the statement of 1885. The distinction between “Anthropomorphic Theism” and “Cosmic Theism,” he wrote, was not intended to convey the impression that in cosmic theism there is nothing anthropomorphic.⁴⁴ In both positions there were elements of anthropomorphism. The difference between them was that in the former the “anthropomorphic element is gross”; in the latter “it is refined and subtle.” The explanation of this difference was to be found in the historical study of the rise of the two streams of thought. All theistic ideas, he said, arose in the sense of dependence upon something outside of ourselves.⁴⁵ The primitive man attempted to explain this power or powers, upon which he felt himself to be dependent, in the only terms at his disposal: the human will. “The primitive man could see that his own actions were prompted by desire and guided by intelligence, and he supposed the same to be the case with the sun and the wind, the frost and the lightning.”⁴⁶ This personification of physical forces was aided by the primitive belief in ghosts, a belief that everyone and everything has “another self.” The earliest form of religious worship, therefore, was the worship of ancestors, the propitiation of those “other selves,” which at times were believed to animate the forces of nature.⁴⁷ Here the stream divided. While it was true that “the religion of antiquity was an inextricable tangle of ancestor-worship with nature-worship,” it was also true that for some peoples the former became predominant, and for others, the latter. The group which favored the latter Fiske found best exemplified in the Greeks. Here the capacity and the attempt to elaborate scientific theories of the universe resulted in the ability to deify the powers of nature without having recourse to the conception of

⁴⁴ *The Idea of God, Writings*, XXI, 169-170.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, XXI, 131-132.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XXI, 136.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XXI, 133.

“ghosts.” Thus these peoples were able “to frame the conception of God acting in and through the powers of nature, without the aid of any grossly anthropomorphic symbolism.” This conception, best expressed by the Stoics, was influential in the Christian tradition through Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Athanasius. Within this system the Deity was, for the most part, regarded as “immanent in the universe and eternally operating through natural laws.”⁴⁸ This “fundamental conception of God as the indwelling life of the universe” was seen as the precursor of modern scientific thought—what Fiske was calling “Cosmic Theism.”

The other stream reached the Christian tradition through the Latin world. It was linked to the aspect of ancestor-worship which emphasized the concept of “tutelar deities.”⁴⁹ The universe came to be viewed (in the monotheistic version of this conception) “as an inert lifeless machine, impelled by blind forces which have been set acting from without; and God is conceived as acting apart from the world in solitary inaccessible majesty.”⁵⁰ Fiske found this stream exemplified in Epicurus and Lucretius in the pagan Latin world, and in Augustine in the Christian tradition.⁵¹ The success of this second, or “anthropomorphic,” stream of theism was attributed to its suitability to the “lower grades of culture in Western Europe, and to the Latin political genius.” Its penetration into the thought of Christendom had been responsible for the “complicated misunderstanding which, by a lamentable confusion of thought, is commonly called ‘the conflict between re-

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, XXI, 145-146.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XXI, 139.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XXI, 151.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XXI, 155. Fiske’s criticism of Augustine showed a tendency to emphasize those statements in Augustine’s writings which could be interpreted in such a way as to substantiate Fiske’s thesis. Augustine’s “doctrine of original sin,” he said, led him to represent “humanity as cut off from all relationship with God, who is depicted as a crudely anthropomorphic Being far removed from the universe and accessible only through the mediating offices of an organized church.” God, under the Augustinian system, was a “Being actuated by human passions and purposes, localizable in space and utterly remote from that inert machine, the universe in which we live, and upon which He acts intermittently through the suspension of what are called natural laws” (*ibid.*, XXI, 155-156).

ligion and science.'"⁵² This second conception, as contrasted to the conception of an "immanent God," was what Fiske now meant by "Anthropomorphic Theism." The terms ("cosmic" and "anthropomorphic") were still useful to contrast the "cosmic theism of Clement and Origen, of Spinoza and Lessing and Schleiermacher," with the "anthropomorphic conception held by Tertullian and Augustine, Calvin and Voltaire and Paley."⁵³ But the distinction between the meaning of the two terms was not now considered to be as rigid as Fiske had once insisted. He was willing to admit that cosmic theism was, to an extent, anthropomorphic. This was necessitated, he said, because there is "presumed to be a likeness of some sort between God and Man." Unless some link between the Human Soul and the "eternal source of existence" was presumed, the outcome was atheism, which, "on its metaphysical side is 'the denial of anything psychical in the universe outside of human consciousness.'"⁵⁴ Consequently, the complete rejection of anthropomorphism would mean the "demolition of theism." The real question now was: What kind of anthropomorphism is permissible in the light of our modern knowledge of the universe; that is, what symbols come closest to expressing the relationship between man's highest attributes and the supreme Reality of the universe?

The answer to this question led Fiske into the second of his two re-evaluations, the consideration of the teleological implications in the universe. In the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* he had condemned the teleological argument, particularly in the form which William Paley had given it. The origin of the argument, he said, was to be found in the unwarranted and crude anthropomorphism which had been dominant in traditional Christian theology.

It is the complex and organized correspondence of the mind with its environment, which seems to furnish inductive justification to the thinker who is pre-disposed to see in nature the workings of a mind like his

⁵² *Ibid.*, XXI, 156-157.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, XXI, 169-170.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 170.

own. . . . by a natural but deceptive analogy, he infers that what has taken place in the tiny portion of the universe which owns himself as its designer must also have taken place throughout the whole. . . . By a subtle realism he projects the idea of himself out upon the field of phenomena, and deals with it henceforth as an objective reality. Human intelligence made the watch, therefore superhuman intelligence made the flower.⁵⁵

The trouble with this position, said Fiske, was that intelligence had not made the environment. Rather, it was the environment which had moulded the intelligence. The "coin Mind" had been stamped in the "mint of Nature." The likeness of the "die to its impression" had led some theologians to invert the causal relation of the two and to make Mind the die rather than the coin. The result was the tendency on the part of such theologians to attribute the same ability of "design," which they found in man's limited creative efforts, to the "Mind" of the Cosmic Creator.⁵⁶ In 1874 this suggestion of an *a priori* purpose as the basis for the explanation of the universe was totally unacceptable to Fiske.

In 1885 this old teleological argument was still unacceptable. He found in it two fatal weaknesses. One was to be seen in relation to the problem of evil. In order to show that the world was the work of an intelligent Designer, it was necessary to sacrifice either omnipotence or absolute benevolence as an attribute of the Deity. Nature was full of "cruelty and maladaptation." Thus, if the Creator is omnipotent, "he cannot be actuated solely by a desire for the welfare of his creatures, but must have other ends in view to which this is in some measure subordinated." If the Creator is "absolutely benevolent," then he cannot be omnipotent, and we must accept the presence of "something in the nature of things which sets limits to his creative Power."⁵⁷ The other weakness was to be seen in the attempt to picture an "omnipotent Designer." "It is not omnipotence that contrives and plans and adapts means to ends. These are the methods of

⁵⁵ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 215-216.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI, 217.

⁵⁷ *The Idea of God, Writings*, XXI, 177-178.

finite intelligence; they imply the overcoming of obstacles; and to ascribe them to omnipotence is to combine words that severally possess meanings into a phrase that has no meaning.”⁵⁸ The most that this old teleological argument could hope to accomplish, therefore, was “to make it seem probable that the universe was wrought into its present shape by an intelligent and benevolent Being immeasurably superior to Man, but far from infinite in power and resources.”⁵⁹ Such an argument, said Fiske, hardly rises to the level of true theism.

The discoveries of modern science had shown that those harmonies upon which the argument from design was based were the results of long ages of adaptation in an organic world. The universe is not a machine, but an organism, with an indwelling principle of life. “It was not made, but it has grown.” Thus, “Paley’s simile of the watch is no longer applicable to such a world as this. It must be replaced by the simile of the flower.”⁶⁰ Purpose had to be read from nature, not into nature. “Adaptation” gave rise to the idea of design, but man was not warranted in arguing that adaptation was the result of design or purpose external to the process. The harmony of nature was itself but a natural product—it did not come into existence “through a supernatural process of manufacture at the hands of a Creator outside of itself.”⁶¹

But these weaknesses applied only to the anthropological theism as now defined and to the teleology which that theism

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XXI, 181.

⁵⁹ *Idem.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XXI, 184. The direction of the change in Fiske’s thought can be seen in the comparison of this position with the earlier statement in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*. There he rejected even the simile of the flower if by that was implied an “intelligent designer” after the analogy of the human designer of the watch. Now he found the simile of the flower adequate to express the teleology which might be inferred from nature itself: an “end” which was growing, being progressively realized; a tendency to be read from nature’s processes, but not into those processes. However, inasmuch as Fiske accepted an “immanent Deity,” of whom the phenomenal world is the “visible garment,” it is questionable to what extent he really escaped the contradiction of his earlier position.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, XXI, 185. The emphasis here is upon the separation of the Creator from the creation. The distinction which Fiske was making was between the unacceptable idea of “supernaturally made” and the acceptable idea of “naturally grown.” The latter idea involves the immanence of the Creator.

accepted. The way was now open for the adoption of "cosmic theism" and a higher conception of teleology. This new teleology would be phrased in quasi-psychical terms and, as such, it would satisfy the "teleological instinct in Man" which could not be suppressed or ignored.

The human soul shrinks from the thought that it is without kith or kin in all this wide universe. Our reason demands that there shall be a reasonableness in the constitution of things. This demand is a fact in our psychical nature. . . . No ingenuity of argument can bring us to believe that the infinite Sustainer of the universe will "put us to permanent intellectual confusion." There is in every earnest thinker a craving after a final cause; and this craving can no more be extinguished than our belief in objective reality. . . . Our belief in what we call the evidence of our senses is less strong than our faith that in the orderly sequence of events there is a meaning which our minds could fathom were they only vast enough.⁶²

While, theoretically speaking, we can frame no adequate conception of God, this difficulty is one which may, "for all practical purposes, be surmounted by the aid of a symbolic conception."⁶³ Practically, therefore, we can define the nature of God. For the cosmic theist this practical definition of Ultimate Being is derived from the implications of the highest attributes of man to which the evolving universe bears witness.

What can we say finally, then, about the nature of this being who is the "eternal source of phenomena"? We have seen that he is One, "indwelling in the universe, in whom we live and move and have our being." We have seen that, inadequate though the term may be, we must speak of him as "quasi-psychical." But the highest development of the psychical life has an ethical meaning and interpretation. While we may "exhaust the resources of metaphysics" in arguing about the applicability of such terms to God, this ethical tendency does reveal to man the meaning of the universe. To those who seek a "living God" and not an "empty

⁶² *Ibid.*, XXI, 188-189.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 190.

formula or metaphysical abstraction," the nature of God is seen at last to answer to the implications of man's ethical life.

Practically there is a purpose in the world whereof it is our highest duty to learn the lesson, however well or ill we may fare in rendering a scientific account of it. When from the dawn of life we see all things working together toward the evolution of the highest spiritual attributes of Man, we know, however the words may stumble in which we try to say it, that God is in the deepest sense a moral Being. The ever-lasting source of phenomena is none other than the infinite Power that makes for righteousness.⁶⁴

The full implication of these conclusions was referred to once more by Fiske. In 1899 he wrote the first of his final two essays on religion, *Through Nature to God*. In the third part of that book, "The Everlasting Reality of Religion," he spoke of "religion's first postulate" as the "Quasi-Human God."⁶⁵ While this description was admittedly an "assumption," the "notion of a kinship between God and Man" was seen to be "essential to theism." If we take away from our notion of God the human element, then our theism vanishes. What we have left is Dynamics—not Theology.⁶⁶

Fiske had come a long way in his thought from the position which he had stated in the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*: that to represent the Diety as intelligent was to destroy its infinity and its self-existence. But he believed that the change in his thought was made possible through two redefinitions. In the first he had redefined the "anthropomorphism" which he was rejecting in such a way as to exclude from the definition for all practical purposes, the higher attributes of man. The anthropomorphism involved in speaking of God in "psychical" or "ethical" terms was now considered to be a legitimate part of the theistic position. This opened the door to the possibility of a positive knowledge of God which would supplement the Spencerian theory of the "Unknowable." Back of this redefinition was Fiske's conviction

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XXI, 210.

⁶⁵ *Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 349.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, XXI, 351.

that man's intuitive awareness of Deity was not eccentric to reality. He was willing to admit "anthropomorphisms" into his cosmic theism because he saw no other way to give to man's intuitions the dignity which he believed they possessed.

The second redefinition concerned teleology. In his early works all purpose and design were rejected as investing the Deity with unwarranted anthropomorphic attributes. In his later works the "teleology" which he was rejecting (purpose imposed from without the process) was distinguished from the "teleology" which he was accepting (purpose which derived from the process itself). The latter kind could now be spoken of as the "purpose of the Deity" since this Deity was immanent in, though not exhausted by, the phenomena which made up the process. The assumption was that, in the light of this new teleology, the development of man's higher attributes was the clue to the meaning of the process and hence to the nature of the Being revealed in the process. Thus the higher attributes of man really indicated the metaphysical nature of God. It is true that the metaphysics involved here had more affinity to the "ethical" side of man's nature than to the more formal "theoretical" side. When we remember, however, that, in Fiske's system, the "ethical" nature is really an evolutionary extension of the "psychical" nature, the distinction between the two tends to fade. We have a description of Deity which serves, for all practical purposes, as a designation of the real nature of that Deity—in other words, a metaphysics in everything except name.

II. MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In the *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* Fiske stated his epistemological position as it had reference to the knowledge of God in very succinct terms:

... Deity is unknowable just in so far as it is not manifested to consciousness through the phenomenal world—knowable just in so far as it is thus manifested; unknowable in so far as infinite and absolute—knowable in the order of its phenomenal manifestations: knowable, in a symbolic way.

as the Power which is disclosed in every throb of the mighty rhythmic life of the universe; knowable as the eternal Source of a Moral Law which is implicated with each action of our lives, and in obedience to which lies our only guaranty of the happiness which is incorruptible, and which neither inevitable misfortune nor unmerited obloquy can take away. Thus, though we may not by searching find out God, though we may not compass infinitude or attain to absolute knowledge, we may at least know all that it concerns us to know, as intelligent and responsible beings. Those who seek to know more than this, to transcend the conditions under which alone is knowledge possible, are, in Goethe's profound language, as wise as little children who, when they have looked into a mirror, turn it around to see what is behind it.⁶⁷

Fiske never departed, substantially, from this position. During the years that followed, however, he did come to expand it in two directions. There was, first, a growing emphasis upon the expanding environment of man, particularly in the psychical area, which meant that the increasing manifestations of Deity to our consciousness provided for an enlargement in the area of the "knowable." Second, there was an increasing tendency to give more validity to the representations of Deity contained in the symbols which man used. Man was growing in the knowledge of God. The area of the "unknowable" was being diminished, although it would never be totally obliterated; consequently, man's more recent characterizations of God were more nearly representative of the true nature of God than his earlier symbols.

The expanding environment of man was the result of two factors, his scientific studies and evolution itself. The first increased, quantitatively, his knowledge of the phenomenal world; the second was altering the environment qualitatively in such a way that the *milieu* in which adjustment took place was becoming increasingly psychical. The "scientific conquest achieved by the nineteenth century," wrote Fiske in 1896, "is a marvellous story without parallel in the history of human achievement."⁶⁸ At the heart of this conquest was the formulation of the doctrine of

⁶⁷ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 317-318.

⁶⁸ "A Century of Science," *Writings*, XXII, 35.

evolution. Around the establishment of this doctrine the great battle for the intellectual advance of man had been fought. The outcome of the battle had been the release of "a resistless and world-wide influence" which was pushing back the horizons of men's minds in almost every area of knowledge.

From age to age, our knowledge is growing from more to more. From the discovery of America, from the astronomy of Copernicus and the physics of Galileo, down to the universal doctrine of evolution in our own time, there has been one grand coherent and consecutive tale of ever enlarging, ever more organized knowledge of the world in which we live. By this enlarged experience our minds are affected, from day to day and from year to year, in more ways than we can detect or enumerate.⁶⁹

Vast changes in the mental attitudes of men were being wrought. Outworn orthodoxies were being replaced by a new and better "fabric of modern knowledge." These orthodoxies, the "outcome of more primitive and childlike thinking," had "ceased to fit the world as we know it, and therefore they fade and fall away from us, in spite of all our efforts to retain undisturbed their venerable and hallowed associations." The future of knowledge was open. Man now had the tools, the "methods of research," with which he was pushing back the boundaries of space and time. The possibilities of this extension were almost limitless.

Deadening, cramping finality has lost its charm for him who has tasted of the ripe fruit of the tree of knowledge. In this broad universe of God's wisdom and love, not leashes to restrain us are needed, but wings to sustain our flight. Let bold but reverent thought go on and probe creation's mysteries, till faith and knowledge "make one music as before, but vaster."⁷⁰

In the light of this conclusion about the advancing boundaries of knowledge Fiske sought to interpret early mythological attempts to define the Deity. He defined myths as "rudimentary cosmic philosophies." "The myths of antiquity and of modern savagery constitute philosophy in its most primitive form, and

⁶⁹ "The Origins of Liberal Thought in America," *Writings*, XXII, 145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XXII, 146.

embody whatever wisdom fetishism has to offer as the result of its meditations upon the life of man and the life of nature.”⁷¹ The construction of a “rich mythology” was indicative of a “considerable latent philosophic capacity.” The principal difference between the explanation of phenomena by a myth and the explanation by cosmic philosophy in its more advanced stage was to be found in the inability of the framer of the myth to form “generalized or abstract notions of divinity.” The myth-maker was lost “amid an endless multitude of unexplained and apparently unconnected phenomena,” and could only resort to the inadequate symbolization of which he was capable. The real difference between “scientific and mythologic inference,” therefore, consisted “solely in the number of checks which in the former case combined to prevent any other than the true conclusion from being framed into a proposition to which the mind assents.”⁷² A myth then is not necessarily useless; it is only “inaccurate and untrustworthy.” The advance of scientific knowledge was serving to correct these inaccuracies and to render the process of explanation more trustworthy.

The mere quantitative extension of the horizons of the human mind, however, was not enough to explain Fiske’s theory of the growing knowledge of God. At best such an extension made possible the arena in which a greater knowledge could be acquired. To this enlarging area the mind itself must make adjustments, and these adjustments served to increase the depth and clarity of knowledge. We have already traced Fiske’s arguments for the ultimate psychical nature of the universe. As to

⁷¹ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 262.

⁷² *Ibid.*, XIII, 154-155. “... we define a *myth* as, in its origin, an explanation, by the uncivilized mind, of some natural phenomenon; not an allegory, not an esoteric symbol, ... but an explanation. Primitive men had no profound science to perpetuate by means of allegory, nor were they such sorry pedants as to talk in riddles when plain language would serve their purpose. Their minds, we may be sure, worked like our own, and when they spoke of the far-darting sun-god they meant just what they said, save that where we propound a scientific theorem they constructed a myth. A thing is said to be explained when it is classified with other things with which we are already acquainted. That is the only kind of explanation of which the highest science is capable” (*Myths and Myth-Makers, Writings*, XVII, 28-29).

the origin of mind, he was not willing to commit himself. With Spencer, he agreed that we "cannot obtain mind from the 'primordial fire-mist' unless the germs of mind were somehow present already."⁷³ But this was so vague as to be useless as an explanation. The best we can do, he said, is to "say *when* (i.e., in connection with what material circumstances) mind came upon the scene of evolution; but we can neither say *whence*, nor *how*, nor *why*."⁷⁴ Given the presence of mind, however, Fiske was certain that it was evolving in a pattern discernible to the investigator:

... the intelligence of any man consists partly of inner relations adjusted from moment to moment in conformity with the outer relations present in his own environment, and partly of organized and integrated inner relations bequeathed him by countless generations of ancestors, brute and human, and adjusted to the outer relations constantly presented in innumerable ancestral environments.⁷⁵

The evolution of intelligence had kept pace more or less evenly with the changes of the environment with which it had interacted. Thus our senses, one by one, assumed distinct existence; our emotions were "generated in conformity with the necessities entailed by outward circumstances."⁷⁶ Fiske's theory of the prolongation of infancy enabled him to picture the pattern of the evolution of intelligence in terms of greater and greater adjustment on the part of the higher emotions of feelings. The "Rubicon" crossed by Natural Selection in its preference of psychical factors over physical factors was aided by the theory of infancy which stressed the value of these higher feelings. The

⁷³ "A Crumb for the Modern Symposium," *Writings*, XX, 65.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XX, 66. Cf. Fiske's position on the question of the origin of the soul: "When does the immortal soul of the human individual come into existence? Is it at the moment of conception, or when the new-born babe begins to breathe, or at some moment between, or even perhaps at some era of early childhood when moral responsibility can be said to have begun? Some of the answers to these questions would transform an ephemeral creature into an immortal one in the same person. The most proper answer is a frank confession of ignorance. Whether it be in the individual or in the race, we cannot tell just where the soul comes in" (*Life Everlasting*, *Writings*, XXI, 414).

⁷⁵ *Cosmic Philosophy*, *Writings*, XVI, 212.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI, 213.

new environment produced by the enlarging family had its correlate in the developing intelligence of man along the higher psychical lines. Such a development was, for Fiske, "according to the nature of things." The psychical interpretation of reality was a sounder position to assume than a materialistic interpretation; and the higher the psychical adjustment the more complete the interpretation would be. Thus, not only was the horizon of man's knowledge expanding, but the depth and clarity of his insight was increasing. Knowledge was becoming surer and surer.

It is important to note that Fiske was using an ethical approach to the problem of the knowledge of God. Increasing knowledge was that which was being derived more and more from the higher psychical insights of man; insights which we call "ethical" and "religious." The appearance of these ethical attributes in man's evolutionary development made religious knowledge possible.

Now there was a critical moment in the history of our planet, when love was beginning to play a part hitherto unknown, when notions of right and wrong were germinating in the nascent Human Soul. . . . It was the moment when the process of evolution was being shifted to a higher plane. . . . At that critical moment we see the nascent Human Soul vaguely reaching forth toward something akin to itself not in the realm of fleeting phenomena but in the Eternal Presence beyond. . . . The cardinal fact is that the crude childlike mind was groping to put itself into relation with an ethical world not visible to the senses.⁷⁷

All the analogies which might be drawn from the history of evolution supported the conviction that this relation actually put man into contact with a real Being. It would be "utterly without precedent in the whole history of evolution," he wrote, if this relation between the Human Soul and the invisible and immaterial world was one in which "only the subjective term is real and the objective term is non-existent."⁷⁸ The knowledge which

⁷⁷ *Through Nature to God, Writings, XXI, 368-369.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid., XXI, 369.*

this relation furnished was not only of God's existence but, to some extent at least, of his essence. The ethical process was destined to reach its "full consummation" in the "Unseen World." The nature of God, therefore, as the primary content of this Unseen World, was in accord with man's highest ethical responses. Man's religious quest, and his conviction that he knew what God was like, were valid. The search had for its object, not a "delusive phantom," but the "living God." In spite of the seemingly endless groping and striving, the Human Soul was gradually rising to a recognition of the essential kinship between itself and the Deity who was the object of true religious faith. That kinship made knowledge possible.

Fiske's conviction of this essential kinship between the human soul, as it was evolving, and ultimate reality, enabled him to conclude that the symbols which man used to characterize God were becoming more and more accurate. As a result, both of the evolution of the mind and of expanding scientific knowledge, man's "explanations" were more truly descriptive and the words which he used more adequate. The inadequacies of the early quasi-human characterizations of God were wrong only in so far as they were inadequate. Through the agencies of evolution and increasing knowledge we now have a higher and truer concept of what "human" means. We are also shown that the development of this "human" is the end for which creation has been striving. To read ultimate reality in terms of this concept, therefore, is to be true to the highest and most accurate knowledge we have. Religion had always provided an avenue to knowledge of reality. Time and evolution were serving to purify the symbols which religion had suggested. Once man became aware of what the Deity purposed in creation (and evolution revealed that), the religious aspiration after adjustment with this Deity could be accomplished. Since man was the object which evolution had sought to produce, it was legitimate to frame the relationship of knowledge between man and God in terms drawn from the highest development of man. "Ethical" symbols were adequate expres-

sions of the nature of God, and knowledge of God's essence, therefore, was possible. Ostensibly, Fiske's conclusions at this point were based on his reading of the "scientific facts." Actually, however, they reflect an interpretation of those facts which his deeply rooted convictions about man's religious insight furnished. The "scientific verification" was in the direction of establishing the validity of human ethical and religious intuitions from the psychological standpoint. Such verification placed the stamp of authenticity upon man's claim to knowledge of God. We may seriously question, however, whether he would have arrived at his optimistic conclusions if his own essential belief in religious knowledge had not made him dissatisfied with the agnostic implications of his earlier position, and led him to the search for a position which would be in harmony with the faith which he intuitively held.

CHAPTER FIVE

HUMAN ACTION IN THE COSMIC PLAN

THE ATTEMPT to establish harmony between human knowledge and human aspirations, which was the expressed purpose of Fiske's philosophical system, was not complete when it had shown that man's religious beliefs concerning the Deity were substantiated by the findings of science. Full religious response involved more than knowledge of God; it was also concerned with man's attitudes and actions, with his response to his awareness of God's demands, and his practical interest in the possibilities of his future. Thus Fiske's philosophical examination of religion was extended to cover the fields of ethics and the destiny of man. First, the relationship between man and the Divine Cosmic Power, which made knowledge of God possible, was stated in terms of man's ethical responsibility. Fiske was confident that adequate religious response involved ethical sensitivity and action. He believed that Cosmic Theism could demonstrate that man's conviction that ethical action was in harmony with the ultimate meaning of life was a valid conviction in the light of evolution. The study of the evolutionary development of man would yield evidence that the action indicated by the demands of an evolving universe were in substantial agreement with the imperatives derived from the ethical sensitivity of man. Ethics could, therefore, be grounded

in the theism which was congenial to the acceptance of evolution and found to be in harmony with the postulates of action which had arisen in the history of religion.

The final contribution of philosophy to religion would be the consideration of the compatibility of man's aspirations and beliefs about the future with the prospects which evolution revealed about the destiny of man and the purpose of the universe. Here again Fiske found positive agreement, although he was cautious against asserting that the same degree of "proof" could be found here as in the other areas of religious belief. He found sufficient analogical support, however, to enable him to affirm that the ideas of a Kingdom of God upon earth and personal immortality for the individual were valid projections of the scientific reading of man's past development and his present potentialities.

I. ETHICS IN THE COSMIC PROCESS

"In no department of inquiry," wrote Fiske, "is the truth and grandeur of the Doctrine of Evolution more magnificently illustrated than in the province of ethics."¹ The explanation of the significant place which ethical feelings and activities occupy in the cosmic process is, therefore, the most important task of the philosopher.

. . . in the study of the moral sense we contemplate the last and noblest product of evolution which we can ever know,—the attribute latest to be unfolded in the development of psychical life, and by the possession of which we have indeed become as gods, knowing the good and the evil. . . . To us the development of the noblest of human attributes must ever remain the last term in the stupendous series of cosmic changes, of which the development of planetary systems is the first term. And our special synthesis of the phenomena of cosmic evolution . . . will be fitly concluded when we have offered a theory of the genesis of those psychical activities whose end is to secure to mankind the most perfect fulness of life upon this earth, which is its dwelling place.²

Fiske claimed that his ethical theory was really a reconcilia-

¹ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 152.

² *Ibid.*, XVI, 104-105.

tion in a "deeper synthesis" of the ethical position of Locke and Kant; that from the standpoint of cosmic philosophy, "the so-called doctrine of utilitarianism and the doctrine of moral intuitions" were seen to be "by no means so incompatible with one another as may at first appear."

Admitting the truth of the Kantian position, that there exists in us a moral sense for analyzing which our individual experience does not afford the requisite data, and which must therefore be regarded as ultimate for each individual, it is nevertheless open to us to inquire into the emotional antecedents of this organized moral sense as exhibited in ancestral types of psychical life. The inquiry will result in the conviction that the moral sense is not ultimate, but derivative, and that it has been built up out of slowly organized experiences of pleasures and pains.³

The start of this inquiry was made in a definition of pleasures and pains. Fiske's definition, paraphrased from Spencer, was: ". . . pleasure is a state of consciousness accompanying modes of activity which tend to increase the fulness of life of an organism, while pain is a state of consciousness accompanying modes of activity which tend to diminish the fulness of life."⁴ Since "fulness of life" involves the perfection of adjustments, the definition can be stated: "Pleasure is a state of consciousness accompanying the relatively complete adjustment of inner to outer relations, while Pain is a state of consciousness attendant upon the discordance between inner and outer relations."⁵ Natural selection will operate to insure the preservation of those races "whose feelings, on the average, result in actions which are in harmony with environing relations"; that is, those races which endeavor to maintain the state of consciousness called "pleasure." Pleasures are to be seen,

³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 108.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 114; cf. Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, I, 280: "If we substitute for the word Pleasure the equivalent phrase—a feeling which we seek to bring into consciousness and retain there, and if we substitute for the word Pain the equivalent phrase—a feeling which we seek to get out of consciousness and to keep out; we see at once that, if the states of consciousness which a creature endeavours to maintain are the correlatives of injurious actions, and if the states of consciousness which it endeavours to expel are the correlatives of beneficial actions, it must quickly disappear through persistence in the injurious and avoidance of the beneficial."

⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 115.

therefore, as "incentives to life-supporting acts"; pains, as "deterrants from life-destroying acts."⁶ But this simple analysis of pain and pleasure is not sufficient to account for a "general doctrine of morality." We cannot identify the "phenomena of Right and Wrong" with the "phenomena of Pleasure and Pain." "Any philosophy of ethics, . . . which might be founded upon the preceding analysis, could be nothing more than a theory of Hedonism, recognizing no other incentive to proper action than the pleasing of one's self."⁷ In contrast to such hedonism, Fiske insisted that his theory was a higher type of utilitarianism. The difference between the two was really the difference between the "noblest self-sacrifice and the meanest self-fondling," and was expressed in the relative emphasis placed upon the well-being of the community. In the hedonistic theory the well-being of the community was really left out of account. If our only concern was with the "incentives to action in a race of brute animals" this would be sufficient. But in the utilitarian theory which was designed to include the motives of men, the well-being of the community, even when incompatible with that of the individual, was the all-important consideration.

While the actions deemed pleasurable are those which conduce to the fulness of life of the Individual, the actions deemed right are those which conduce to the fulness of life of the Community. And while the actions deemed painful are those which detract from the fulness of life of the Individual, the actions deemed wrong are those which detract from the fulness of life of the Community. According to utilitarianism, therefore, as here expounded, the conduct approved as moral is the disinterested service of the community, and the conduct stigmatized as immoral is the selfish preference of individual interests to those of the community.⁸

It is obvious therefore that something more is needed to account for a true "moral sense" than a theory of pleasures and

⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI, 123.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XVI, 124.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 125. If we define "community" as including the entire human race, the "ultimate theorem of the utilitarian philosophy" becomes "actions morally right are those which are beneficial to Humanity, while actions morally wrong are those which are detrimental to Humanity" (*idem*).

pains. Fiske was Kantian enough to refuse to identify this moral sense with a conscious or deliberate process of reasoning to a conclusion concerning acts which are beneficial or detrimental to the community. This moral sense was a part of the "psychical structure" and acted as instinctively as our tactile sense. Nor could we explain the origin of this sense as a "gradual organization of . . . inductions from experience," which, in the evolutionary process, had resulted in an hereditary capacity to judge automatically between right and wrong.⁹ Fiske's answer to this problem of the origin of the moral sense in man was to suggest that it developed in the condition which gave rise to social evolution as contrasted to organic evolution. This meant that it was to be referred for explanation to the phenomenon of the prolongation of infancy in the higher, human race. The prolongation of infancy was the door through which sympathy (the "power of ideally reproducing in one's self the pleasures and pains of another person") entered the corridor of psychical evolution. Given this "rudimentary capacity for sympathy," he felt that he could account for the emergence of "emotional incentives to actions" as they are developed in the arena of "family integration."¹⁰ Courage, cowardice, and the like are prompted by feelings of collective pleasure or pain, and this quite apart from "any generalization of the effects of certain actions." New incentives to action are generated within the permanent family relationship, but no one knows, or consciously reasons, why the conduct indicated has been established as "moral."¹¹

A corollary development of these incentives to action is the "genesis of the feelings of regret and remorse, which are the fundamental ingredients of conscience."¹² Here Fiske followed Darwin's argument in *The Descent of Man*. Conscience arises out of the conflict between the incentives to action beneficial to the community and lingering selfish impulses which are strong enough at times to acquire temporary mastery over the former.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 126-127.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 138-139.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 137.

¹² *Ibid.*, XVI, 139-140.

Though at the moment of action a man may yield to the desire of gratifying hunger, or revenge, or cupidity, at the cost of violating the rules enforced by social sanctions, yet afterwards, when "past and weaker impressions are contrasted with the ever-enduring social instincts, retribution will surely come. Man will then feel dissatisfied with himself, and will resolve, with more or less force, to act differently for the future. This is conscience—for conscience looks backward and judges past actions, inducing that kind of dissatisfaction which, if weak, we call regret, and, if severe, remorse."¹³

One other factor is needed to complete the explanation of the moral sense. This is the factor of the "enormous expansion of sympathy which has been due to the continued integration of communities, and to the accompanying decrease in warlike or predatory activity." This has had two effects. First, the opportunities for the exercise of the altruistic feelings have been increased, both in number and frequency of occurrence, while the occasions requiring the exercise of the antisocial feelings have become less frequent. Thus the former have been strengthened by use and the latter weakened by disuse.¹⁴ Second, social integration has supplied the opportunity for the development of a "high representative faculty" which is instrumental in determining the development of sympathy. The increasing "width and variety of experience" results in the development of a sympathetic representation which is increasingly more "highly generalized and impersonal." Thus one comes to feel sympathetically toward those with whom he has had no immediate contact. In such sentiments of response to "the notions of justice and injustice in the abstract" we are far removed from emotions stirred by "consideration of concrete instances of pleasure and pain."¹⁵ It was here that Fiske found the real source of the moral sense.

To this expansion of the power of sympathetically representing feelings detached from the incidents of particular cases, until the sphere of its

¹³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 140-141; cf. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, pp. 111 ff. Notice that this element of moral character can be present only when "intelligence has progressed to a point where there is some definite memory of particular past actions" (Fiske, *Writings*, XVI, 140).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 146, 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 150.

exercise has become even wider than the human race, and includes all sentient existence, is due our instinctive abhorrence of actions which the organically registered experience of mankind has associated with pain and evil, and our instinctive approval of actions similarly associated with pleasure and increased fulness of life.¹⁶

These sympathetic feelings, extended over wider and wider areas, and no longer needing the stimuli of present pleasures or pains to bring them forth, "generate at last our abstract moral sense." It is the mark of the civilized man that he acts from the incentive of such a "sense." While the savage may need some personal end as an incentive, the "philanthropist finds an adequate incentive in the contemplation of injustice in the abstract."¹⁷ An adequate ethical theory therefore involves two points:

On the one hand, it is a corollary from the laws of life that actions desired by the individual and approved by the community must in the long run be those which tend to heighten the life respectively of the individual and of the community. And on the other hand, it is equally true that there is a highly complex feeling, the product of a slow emotional evolution, which prompts us to certain lines of conduct irrespective of any conscious estimate of pleasures or utilities.¹⁸

The first part of this theory is obviously based on an utilitarian criterion—the welfare of humanity. The second part, however, receives its validity from the evolutionary process itself and depends ultimately, therefore, upon the purposes of the cosmos. Since it is this highly developed moral sense which Fiske took to be the real incentive in moral action, the reason for its development becomes the final criterion for the validity of ethical action.

The relationship between the incentive of this moral sense and religion was interpreted in terms which were in keeping with Fiske's distinction between "anthropomorphic" and "cosmic" theism. The first link between religion and morality was estab-

¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XVI, 151.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 151-152. This "feeling" is not, for Fiske, an "organic preference" for good acts or an "organic repugnance" to bad acts. He defines it simply as an inherited feeling which leads us, when we are told that something is wrong, to shun it, without needing to be taught that it is detrimental to society.

lished on the mythological plane. The individual and communal incentives to action were early associated and reinforced with "incentives of a mysterious and supernatural character." In ancestral worship, for example, the dead chief was thought of as visiting "with his wrath those who violate the rules of action established by the tribe." The ethical sanctions of the tribe were given a supernatural support. "As the fetishistic agencies are generalized into the deities of polytheism, and these in time are summed up in a single anthropomorphic deity, there slowly grows up the theory of a hell in which actions condemned by the community will be punished."¹⁹ Action impelled by such an incentive can hardly be called moral in the strict sense. Fiske was willing to concede only that such sentiments made possible "those higher sentiments which do not refer either to personal benefits or evils to be expected from men, or to more remote rewards and punishments."²⁰ It was one of the weaknesses of anthropomorphic theism that it continued to rely upon such supernatural incentives. A sound ethical philosophy, however, would regard it as "degrading to perform good actions merely in order to win applause or to secure a place in heaven."²¹

And yet Fiske recognized an intimate relationship between the sanctions of religion and the incentives to morality. The link, however, was to be reinterpreted in the light of the meaning revealed in the process of evolution. Morality was not something other than religion; the latter was really a response to an enlarged environment, just as the former was a response to a more limited environment. "Religion views the individual in his relations to the Infinite Power manifested in a universe of causally connected phenomena, as Morality views him in relation

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 142.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 144.

²¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 145. Cf. Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, II, ii, 602: ". . . while sermons set forth the torments of the damned and the joys of the blessed as the chief deterrents and incentives, and while we have prepared for us printed instructions 'how to make the best of both worlds,' it cannot be denied that the feelings which impel and restrain men are still largely composed of elements like those operative on the savage. . . ."

to his fellow creatures.”²² When we speak of the principle of some action as “a decree of God,” we really give evidence of our widened environment. But under Cosmic Theism these “decrees of God” are seen to be identical with the laws of Nature. Morality still has religious sanction, and that sanction is now placed on a firmer basis than when it was seen to be the arbitrary commandment of an anthropomorphic deity. The moral sense, then, because it is the product of the process of evolution which has meaning in terms of the purposes of the Deity, has a sanction which springs ultimately from the religious attitude toward this Deity. Moral activity on the part of man is indicated because man, in his highest degree of psychical adjustment, feels a relationship, which can only be described in religious terms, to a Being who, while being the source of all psychical activity, is also seen to be the “Power which makes for righteousness.”

Fiske developed this thought in his essay on “Evolution and Religion” in 1882. Here he was primarily concerned to show that his Cosmic Theism substantiated the ethical as well as the speculative assertions basic to all religions. The same forces which had produced “Humanity” as the crown of the process of evolution had also wrought “into the very fibres of the universe those principles of right living which it is man’s highest function to put into practice.”²³ Thus there is given to ethical activity a theological sanction which is “incomparably the most powerful that has ever been assigned in any philosophy of ethics.” “Human responsibility is made more strict and solemn than ever, when the eternal Power that lives in every event of the universe is thus seen to be in the deepest possible sense the author of the moral law that should guide our lives, and in obedience to which lies our only guarantee of the happiness which is incorruptible.”²⁴

In the last analysis, Fiske’s insistence upon giving religious sanction to ethics really arose from his interpretation of religion

²² *Ibid.*, XVI, 154.

²³ “Evolution and Religion,” *Writings*, XIX, 277.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XIX, 278.

in moral terms. Religious knowledge was made possible by the higher feelings of man which are basically ethical. His argument for the destiny of man, as we shall see, was based upon the conviction of the ethical meaning of evolution. Furthermore, while Fiske maintained the inadequacy of the symbolic representation of God, he did hold that ethical symbols are truer than any others, because the ethical attributes of man are a truer index of reality than any other attributes.²⁵ Cosmic Theism was the product, so he claimed, of a correct reading of the development of the universe; since this development was seen to be in the direction of a high ethical character in man, it was inevitable that Cosmic Theism should be interpreted in moral terms.

The identification of religion and morality had two effects upon Fiske's thought. In the first place, we see that Cosmic Theism is really a moral theism. While he spoke of the most primitive element of the theistic idea as a "notion of *dependence* upon something outside ourselves,"²⁶ the nature of that dependence was defined in moral terms. The awakening of man's higher life was marked by a sense of "ought," first with reference to the family, the community, and finally to God. This "conception of ought, of obligation, of duty, of debt to something outside of self" resulted in the externalization and objectivization of man's ethical standards.²⁷ While, on the stage of religion, the object was the Infinite, the relationship between man and the Infinite was still ethical in nature. The rules of conduct which, if obeyed, brought fuller life, were, on the highest level of life, seen to be given by a Power infinitely above man. The higher life was thus "dependent" upon this Power, and man's response was obedience, necessarily supplemented by a sense of "ought" in lieu of the ability of complete obedience. A theism derived from the cosmic process would be inevitably stated in ethical terms, since the "cosmic process is ethical in the profoundest

²⁵ Thus the high ethical character of man is really a "reflected image of God" (*Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 313).

²⁶ *The Idea of God, Writings*, XXI, 131.

²⁷ *Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 307

sense.”²⁸ Anthropomorphic theism was rejected because the symbols which it used were not ethical enough—that is, they did not speak to man’s highest level of adjustment, but were drawn from a less highly developed stage of man’s life.

This emphasis upon the moral aspect of theism was evidenced in Fiske’s thought in several ways. We can notice it first in his definition of religion itself. The “indestructible essence of all religion,” he wrote, is the “aspiration after a yet higher fulness of life, after a ‘closer walk with God.’” Absolute fulness of life would be equivalent to “an absolutely perfect state of society” where “goodness would have become automatic.”²⁹ The function of religion, therefore, is to provide the aspiration which moves man on toward this ideal. The supreme end of life, at least as far as social destiny is concerned, is thus the same as the intention of religious aspiration. That end, the “supreme epoch of social equilibrium,” Fiske defined as one in which

... every man shall love the Lord with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, in which the beast shall have been worked out, and, in Tennyson’s phrase, the ape and the tiger shall have been allowed to die within us, in which egoistic or anti-social impulses shall be self-restrained, and every one shall spontaneously do that which tends towards the general happiness. . . .³⁰

The evolutionist, no less than the orthodox believer, has a missionary function to fulfil in aiming at the “realization of our social and ethical ideal,” hastening the day “when it may be proclaimed, with fresh significance, that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”³¹

We may also notice this moral emphasis in Fiske’s rejection of “rites and doctrines” as essential to religion. These rites and doctrines had indeed served their purpose, just as institutions had served their purpose in social evolution.

For the great mass of men the idea of God is quite overlaid and

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XXI, 286.

²⁹ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 358-359.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 358.

³¹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 359.

obscured by innumerable symbolic rites and doctrines that have grown up in the course of the long historic development of religion. All such rites and doctrines had a meaning once, beautiful and inspiring or terrible and forbidding, and many of them still retain it. But whether meaningless or fraught with significance, men have wildly clung to them as shipwrecked mariners cling to the drifting spars that alone give promise of rescue from threatening death.³²

When these rites and doctrines come to be considered as the "essentials of religion," and "new moons and sabbaths, decrees of councils and articles of faith" usurp the "place of the living God," then true theism has been sacrificed. Fiske used this criticism as the basis of his evaluation of the Protestant Reformation. As a Protestant he insisted that the Reformation was really a "return to Christianity," and he saw in the work of the Reformers an expression of the essential element in historic Christianity.

The permanent element in Christianity—the feature whereby it may still claim the allegiance of modern thinkers who reject the supernatural theology and the symbolic ritual—is the fact of its placing the conditions of salvation, not in doctrine or in ceremonial, but in right conduct as flowing from the impulse toward a higher life in which religion most essentially consists. Not they that say to me, "Lord, Lord," but they that do the will of our Father in heaven,—such was the first authoritative definition of the aspect of human life with which Christianity primarily concerns itself.³³

Christianity, therefore, places its emphasis on ethical behaviour. But this is only one-half of the picture. The rejection of doctrine and ceremonial means that in true Christianity we have religion presented as "something which concerns the individual alone in the presence of God."³⁴ As an expression of the highest religious insight of man, Christianity recognizes that man has evolved beyond the stage where his primary adjustments are to a limited society to a stage where the immanent God

³² *The Idea of God, Writings*, XXI, 113.

³³ "The Origins of Protestantism," *Writings*, XIX, 236.

³⁴ *Idem*.

himself becomes man's environment. Protestantism re-emphasized this assertion. On the one side this meant that it is a "religious polity which is based upon the conception of individual responsibility for opinion."³⁵ But back of this, and far more important, it meant that Protestantism is a new recognition that man's major environment is God himself and that adjustment to that environment is made on the ethical level. The "true lesson of Protestantism" was found in its assertion that "religious belief is something which in no way concerns society, but which concerns only the individual." This provided the avenue to the recovery of the central truth of Christianity. "Though we may, and do, throw overboard the whole of the semi-barbaric mythology in which Christianity has hitherto been symbolized, we shall find, nevertheless, that we have kept firmly in our possession the ethical kernel for which Christianity is chiefly valued even by those who retain the whole of this mythology."³⁶ Cosmic Theism was the attempt to recover and restate this essential ethical ingredient.

The second effect which the identification of religion and morality had upon Fiske's thought was that it provided for an identification of the moral ideal and the Kingdom of God. The insistence upon individual responsibility as contrasted with corporate responsibility might lead to a conception of the Kingdom of God in terms of isolated individual salvation or vision of God. Fiske escaped this danger through his prior emphasis upon the union of ethical action and religious response on the level of man's highest development. Cosmic Theism did not reject the possibility of an ideal state. It only insisted that this state permit

³⁵ *Ibid.*, XIX, 242-243. ". . . the Protestantism of Luther is significant mainly as a revolt against primeval notions of the relations of the individual to the community, which have long since survived their usefulness. . . . I need hardly argue that any revival of the methods of Catholicism could never occur, except as the concomitant of a wholly improbable retrogression of society toward the barbaric type. The very conception of an infallible church is so clearly a survival from primitive religious ideas, that to imagine such an institution presiding over the society of the future involves a most grotesque anachronism" ("The True Lesson of Protestantism," *Writings*, XIX, 262-263).

³⁶ *Cosmic Philosophy*, *Writings*, XVI, 293.

freedom of action within the society and find its ideal in the true Christian presentation of the Kingdom of God.

We, too, as well as the Positivists, have our ideal state of society,—a state . . . in which the greatest possible fulness of life shall be ensured to each member of the community by the circumstances that in the long course of social equilibration the desires of each individual shall have become slowly moulded into harmony with the coexistent desires of neighboring individuals.³⁷

Such a state was not an immediate possibility. It could be realized only in the “indefinitely remote future,” and only then in a relative sense. “The conception of absolute finality is as inconsistent with the Doctrine of Evolution as is the conception of absolute beginning.” It was an ideal epoch to be progressively approximated but never completely realized.³⁸ The approximation to this ideal state, therefore, was best described as a “slow process of growth, intellectual and moral.” Cosmic Theism did not have a doctrine to preach by which there could be effected the “conversion of mankind to a faith based upon scientific knowledge.” The desired effect would be achieved “not by a change of opinion, but by a change of heart.”³⁹ The “amelioration of society and the relief of man’s estate” was not something which man decided to achieve and wrought by the sheer force of his devotion to the ideal. Its actuality could only be the result of the process of evolution itself; society grows, but is not made; “men cannot be *taught* a higher state of civilization, but can only be bred into it. . . .”⁴⁰

This somewhat deterministic attitude was qualified by Fiske

³⁷ *Ibid.*, XVI, 357-358.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 358.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 361.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI, 344. Sociology, as a science, therefore, is valuable only in so far as it helps us “understand the conditions essential to progress, and the direction which progress is taking.” Knowing this, we may avoid the “mischief entailed by stupid and ignorant legislation, and secure the benefits arising from legislation that is scientifically conceived and put into operation with a distinct consciousness of the ends to be secured.” Sociology will merely tell us how not to waste our energies and damage society. Beyond this it can serve us little: “To attempt to construct an ideal polity, by adopting which society is to remodel itself, is to show that we have studied science to little purpose” (*ibid.*, XVI, 348-349).

until both optimism and individual social initiative were salvaged and reinstated in the theory of social progress. The optimism derived from his conviction of the teleology to be found in the cosmic process: ". . . the creating and perfecting of Man is the goal toward which Nature's work has been tending from the first."⁴¹ The study of the evolutionary process revealed that this perfecting of man involved the widening of his sympathetic nature which was the basis of social virtues. "Half the cruelty in the world is the direct result of the stupid incapacity to put one's self in the other man's place." Even in the highest races of man the sympathetic emotions are still too feebly developed to correct this incapacity.

We have made more progress in intelligence than in kindness. For thousands of generations, and until very recent times, one of the chief occupations of men has been to plunder, bruise, and kill one another. The selfish and ugly passions which are primordial—which have the incalculable strength of inheritance from the time when animal consciousness began—have had but little opportunity to grow weak from disuse. The tender and unselfish feelings, which are a later product of evolution, have too seldom been allowed to grow strong from exercise. And the whims and prejudices of the primeval militant barbarism are slow in dying out from the midst of peaceful industrial civilization.⁴²

The "coarser forms of cruelty are disappearing"; but they have been replaced by the application to industrial pursuits of the "notion of antagonism derived from ages of warfare."

Though gentlemen . . . no longer assail one another with knives and clubs, they still inflict wounds with cruel words and sneers. Though the free-thinker is no longer chained to a stake and burned, people still tell lies about him, and do their best to starve him by hurting his reputation. The virtues of forbearance and self-control are still in a very rudimentary state, and of mutual helpfulness there is far too little among men.⁴³

Though we are far from the ideal, the important thing, as Fiske saw it, is that we are moving in the right direction. The

⁴¹ *The Destiny of Man, Writings*, XXI, 75.

⁴² *Ibid.*, XXI, 70-71.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 71.

development of the sympathetic emotions is an observable fact and the promise of even greater improvement is indicated. Man is throwing off, surely, if slowly, his brute inheritance. He is "slowly passing from a primitive social state in which he was little better than a brute, toward an ultimate social state in which his character shall have become so transformed that nothing of the brute can be detected in it."⁴⁴ In theological terms this ideal of an ultimate ethical social state is the Kingdom of God. "Brute inheritance" is thus seen to be what theology has called "original sin." The process of evolution in which this brute inheritance is being thrown off is, therefore, "an advance toward true salvation." The assurance given by a knowledge of the meaning of evolution brings new hope. "The modern prophet, employing the methods of science, may again proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand."⁴⁵ Because evolution assures us that when man eventually becomes what he was destined to be, his spontaneous action will be ethical in character, optimism is warranted. The identification of religion and morality means that this optimism is linked to the religious promises of the coming kingdom of God.

This position would still possess an element of fatalism unless some measure of valid human initiative is provided for. Part of this problem was answered by Fiske in his emphasis upon the importance of the law of use and disuse in evolution. The exercise of the ethical attributes insures their growth. Back of this, however, lay Fiske's continuing conviction that individuality is not antagonistic to high social development, but that the reverse is really true. The higher the individual ethical activity is, the more certain and rapid will be the emergence of an ethical society. In keeping with this conviction he insisted upon a practical ideal which would be close enough to immediate action to provide a real stimulus for that action. The incarnation of the ethical and social ideal begins with very practical and

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, XXI, 72.

⁴⁵ *Idem.*

individual acts: "leading pure and upright lives, suppressing the selfish impulses which are our legacy from the brute, obeying the dictates of sympathy whereby we are chiefly distinguished as human, and conforming as well as we may to the highest ethical code within our ken."⁴⁶ Of such acts will the future society be built. As the coral reef is built of "millions of tiny polyps, each giving up his little life to the process," so the ideal society of the future will be the result of "myriads of individual efforts toward greater completeness of life."

Every temptation that is resisted, every sympathetic impulse that is discreetly yielded to, every noble aspiration that is encouraged, every sinful thought that is repressed, every bitter word that is withheld, adds its little item to the impetus of the great movement which is bearing Humanity onwards toward a richer life and a higher character.⁴⁷

Again, since these individual ethical acts are really concomitants of the response of man in adjustment to his larger environment, the ultimate ideal of society is linked necessarily to the highest adjustment of man, to the acts elicited in his response to God. Ethical activity, ultimately defined, is religious response.

Out of individual rectitude comes the rectitude and happiness of the community; so that the ultimate salvation of mankind is to be wrought out solely by obedience to that religious instinct which . . . urges the individual, irrespective of utilitarian considerations, to live in conformity to nature's requirements. "Nearer, my God, to thee," is the prayer, dictated by the religious faith of past ages, to which the deepest scientific analysis of the future may add new meanings, but of which it can never impair the primary significance.⁴⁸

At the very center of the cosmic process Fiske found an ethical meaning. The validity of man's ethical activity rested ultimately upon his faith in this meaning which the universe yielded, a meaning which evolution had written for the cosmic philosopher to read.

⁴⁶ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 362-363.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XVI, 363. ⁴⁸ *Idem.*

The story shows us Man becoming more and more clearly the image of God, exercising creative attributes, transforming his physical environment, incarnating his thoughts in visible and tangible shapes all over the world, and extorting from the abysses of space the secrets of vanished ages. From lowly beginnings, without breach of continuity, and through the cumulative action of minute and inconspicuous causes, the resistless momentum of cosmic events has tended toward such kind of consummation; and part and parcel of the whole process, inseparably wrapped up with every other part, has been the evolution of the sentiments which tend to subordinate mere egoism to unselfish and moral ends.⁴⁹

When we have learned this lesson, written by evolution and revealed by the study of its process, we will be able to "breathe a clear atmosphere of faith," a faith in "the omnipresent ethical trend." Beneath the "surface din and clashing of the struggle for life" can be heard the "undertone of the deep ethical purpose."⁵⁰ Obedience to man's highest conception of the demands of that purpose is really a religious response to the immanent Author of that purpose. Such response is both the avenue to the knowledge of God and the individual's contribution to the destined society, the Kingdom of God.

II. THE DESTINY OF MAN

The connecting thread which runs through the whole of Fiske's work is a love of mankind and a conviction that the ultimate meaning of the cosmic process is to be read through an understanding of what man is to become. This conviction led him to insist that man's highest aspirations were really the avenue and index to reality, and that no true knowledge could do otherwise than substantiate the claims of those aspirations. As a child of his time he found in the theory of evolution the most adequate system of scientific knowledge and upon that basis he constructed his Cosmic Theism. The end product of his philosophical work was the establishment, according to the best canons of truth which he knew, of the intuitive convictions with which

⁴⁹ *Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 323.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XXI, 324.

he started. The reconciliation of science and religion was so obvious to him precisely because both insisted upon the truth of those convictions. There can be no doubt that Fiske believed that his own theistic statement was simply a restatement of the heart of the Christian religion, stripped of all previous, inadequate attempts at expression. He found the center of religion in the teachings of Jesus, especially in the ethical insights revealed in the Sermon on the Mount. Here was a gospel which, while not ignoring the actual present state of man, spoke prophetically of a better day to come and specified the acceptable activity for the coming society.

The Master knew full well that the time was not yet ripe,—that he brought not peace, but a sword. But he preached nevertheless that gospel of great joy which is by and by to be realized by toiling Humanity, and he announced ethical principles fit for the time that is coming. The great originality of his teaching, and the feature that has chiefly given it power in the world, lay in the distinctness with which he conceived a state of society from which every vestige of strife, and the modes of behaviour adapted to the ages of strife, shall be utterly and forever swept away.⁵¹

Evolution revealed that this ideal was written, as the determining purpose, in the very constitution and process of the cosmos. Those who saw in evolution a degrading of man had not looked deeply enough. Properly understood, evolution splendidly exhibited the grand ideal which the insight of Jesus had placed at the center of the Christian religion.

I believe it has been fully shown that so far from degrading Humanity, or putting it on a level with the animal world in general, the doctrine of evolution shows us distinctly for the first time how the creation and the perfecting of Man is the goal toward which Nature's work has been tending from the first. We can now see clearly that our human knowledge enlarges tenfold the significance of human life, and makes it seem more than ever the chief object of Divine care, the consummate fruition of that creative energy which is manifested throughout the knowable universe.⁵²

⁵¹ *The Destiny of Man, Writings*, XXI, 74-75.

⁵² *Ibid.*, XXI, 75.

Cosmic Theism, therefore, was primarily a philosophy designed to exhibit adequately the meaning of the universe. Since that meaning seemed to point always toward the perfecting of man, the ultimate destiny of man, as an individual and in society, was the point from which all else was to be evaluated. Not what man was or is, but what he is becoming, was the real clue to his relationship with Reality.

We have seen how Fiske established this connection between man and Reality through the medium of ethical activity. Such activity is really adequate response or adjustment to an ever-enlarging environment. At the highest level adequate response is impossible, and adjustment yields to an emotional sense of dependence upon the immanent Source of all things—an essentially religious attitude. The last task which faces the cosmic philosopher is to trace out the implications of this process for the destiny of man. To do so he must forsake his scientific assurance and assume the role of prophet. And yet the prophecy will not be without its source of established truth from which it may proceed. There are "indications of a dramatic tendency" that point the way, and he who has diligently studied the knowable universe has learned the "ever repeated lesson that the order of Nature may be relied on." The scientist in his new role is not without his faith: a "trust that the Deity 'will not put us to permanent intellectual confusion.'"⁵³

We have already noticed that the ultimate historical destiny of man must be interpreted in religious terms: a "kingdom of peace and love," the end result of the process in which the "kingdoms of this earth" are becoming the "kingdom of Christ." The "how" of this process could be traced in the evolutionary development of man. The destiny of man could be deduced from a correct reading of the origin of man plus an understanding of the possibilities of his improbableness. The "Creation of Man" was really complete when the family organization was developed.

⁵³ "Chauncey Wright," *Writings*, XX, 88, 90; cf. *The Destiny of Man*, *Writings*, XXI, 81.

Involved in this development was the lengthened period of infancy and the consequent capacity for progress, and the ability and tendency to judge actions as good or bad according to some standard other than selfish desires. These were the attributes which distinguished man from all other, lower creatures. Since all of these attributes lie on this side of the Rubicon of natural selection, the destiny of *man* must be interpreted in terms of the results of psychical variations and development.

The immediate result was the increase of the cerebrum. This prolonged the infancy, thus giving rise to the capacity for progress; and infancy, in turn, originated the family and thus opened the way for the growth of sympathies and of ethical feelings. All these results have perpetually reacted upon one another until a creature different in kind from all other creatures has been evolved. . . . henceforth the work of evolution, as far as our planet is concerned, is chiefly devoted to the perfecting of this last and most wonderful product of creative energy.⁵⁴

From this origin of man we can catch a glimpse of his destiny. We are additionally aided in this prophetic task by understanding that the "most essential feature of Man is his improvableness." This provides the direction in which the prophetic spirit will look. When we add to that knowledge the observation that all such improvements have continued in the lines of development that were "marked out in the Creation of Man" the specific elements of man's destiny also become known. In other words, we know the direction in which we are moving and we know the kind of roads which we can expect to carry us in that direction.

The most important of these "roads" was the function of sympathy, including the ethical feelings which depend to such a large extent upon that function. In the earliest man the characteristic functions were merely improved brute functions. Primitive men were "simply the most crafty and formidable among brutes." "That moral sense which makes it seem wicked to steal and murder was scarcely more developed in them than in tigers and wolves."⁵⁵ The one developing exception to this condition

⁵⁴ *The Destiny of Man, Writings*, XXI, 47-48.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XXI, 53-54.

of struggle and slaughter was the peaceful co-operation within the family group and the motives developed therein. At first this was almost incidental to the brute struggle; man realized that the "most coherent families would prevail over their less coherent rivals." But the increase of the same altruistic emotions which were feebly evidenced in the primitive family relationship necessitated the eventual elimination of strife. The process by which this is being accomplished is extremely slow, but the tendency is there: "the later history of mankind, during the past thirty centuries, has been characterized by the gradual eliminating of strife. . . ."⁵⁶ This much of the process of the improvement of man is the result of natural selection. Those groups having the highest ethical development were selected and perpetuated their kind.

A new factor enters at this stage, however. "The action of natural selection upon Man has long since been essentially diminished through the operation of social conditions." The process of direct adaptation is now the principal factor in the improvement of civilized man.⁵⁷ Man began to apply his intelligence to the "task of utilizing the forces of inanimate nature" to supply those things (*e. g.*, food and shelter) which he had previously secured through war against his fellows. This rise of "industrial civilization" had a number of effects. First, a new basis for political combination was formed. The old blood-relationship was replaced by a basis furnished by "territorial contiguity and by community of occupation."⁵⁸ Second, a free exchange of the products of labor with the intent of supplying food for all resulted in a decrease in conflict between men. One man's interests were not opposed to another's; conflict between them really hindered the attainment of the basic interest of each.⁵⁹ A

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XXI, 52.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XXI, 67-68.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XXI, 56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XXI, 57. Thus Fiske said that the persistence of the idea that industrial success in one area must be aided by industrial failure in another (an attitude which he found illustrated in the "protective tariff" idea) is really a survival of the "barbarous mode of thinking which fitted the ages before industrial civilization began."

third result of the rise of industrial civilization was to be found in the development of the "arts and sciences which have given to modern life so much of its interest and value."⁶⁰ Technical ability in these areas is increased and more time can be devoted to their pursuit—time which had previously been spent in acquiring the basic necessities of life. Most important of all the results of industrial civilization was its ethical implications. The area in which moral obligations are recognized as binding is vastly increased.

At first confined to the clan, the idea of duty came at length to extend throughout a state in which many clans were combined and fused, and as it thus increased in generality and abstractness, the idea became immeasurably strengthened and ennobled. At last, with the rise of empires, in which many states were brought together in pacific industrial relations, the recognized sphere of moral obligation became enlarged until it comprehended all mankind.⁶¹

This last result alone identifies industrial civilization as a valid part of the evolutionary development of man. Its end result, the elimination of strife, makes it a contributory factor to the envisioned destiny of man, a "kingdom of peace and love."

This same interpretation was placed upon man's political development. The principle of federation, the highest of Fiske's three methods of forming political bodies, was a principle of "voluntary union of small political groups into a great political group."⁶² The element of conquest, with the consequence of strife, is eliminated; local independence is preserved. The result of this tendency toward "federal unions," which has paralleled the growth of industrial civilizations, has been "to strengthen the pacific tendencies of modern society." "We cannot fail to see," he wrote, "that the final extinction of warfare is only a question of time." The "pacific principle of federation," which replaces the method of warfare with "due process of law," must eventually "reign supreme over all the earth."⁶³ Just as the high-

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XXI, 58.

⁶² *Ibid.*, XXI, 62.

⁶¹ *Idem.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 65-66.

est psychical attributes of man are identified with religious feeling, so the highest realization of the principle of federation will be really a "Christian" society. Man is working, politically and economically, toward that society of peace which was the vision of Christ. The evolutionary interpretation of the "great masses of historical fact" confirm our faith in the ultimate realization of that society. When the day of realization is reached, civilization can be said "to have fairly begun," and the world can be said "to have become truly Christian."⁶⁴

The social destiny of man, which we have just traced, was Fiske's major concern. He did not ignore, however, the question of individual immortality, and his last major essay was specifically concerned to "consider the supreme poetic achievement of man—his belief in his own Immortality—in the light of our modern studies of evolution."⁶⁵ While Fiske always insisted that certainty with regard to immortality was an impossibility, in his later essays he did adopt a much more positive attitude toward the validity of faith in immortality than he had held earlier. In his essay on "The Unseen World," he spoke of the "belief in a future life" as being stimulated primarily by "the craving, almost universally felt, for some teleological solution to the problem of existence."⁶⁶ The belief that "all things are working together for some good end" is, he said, the most essential expression of religious faith. Such a belief is inevitably associated with the desire for future life. Indeed, this faith in the good end of life is considered to be "incompatible with belief in the ultimate destruction of sentiency amid the general doom of the material universe. A good end can have no meaning to us save in relation to consciousness that distinguishes and knows the good from the evil."⁶⁷ The future life, therefore, is associated with the feeling for a need for a "solution of the burdensome problem of existence." It is this latter problem which is the real one. The

⁶⁴ *American Political Ideas*, p. 152.

⁶⁵ *Life Everlasting, Writings*, XXI, 380.

⁶⁶ "The Unseen World," *Writings*, XVIII, 73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 74.

speculative interest in the world really predominates; the anxious interest in the self is secondary in all our reasoning about the future. The solution to the secondary problem is found within the answer to the primary one.

Had we but faith enough to lighten the burden of this problem, the inferior question would perhaps be less absorbing. Could we but know that our present lives are working together towards some good end, even an end in no wise anthropomorphic, it would be of less consequence whether we were individually to endure. . . . Believing . . . , though as a simple act of trust, that the end will crown the work, we may rise superior to the question which has here concerned us, and exclaim, in the supreme language of faith, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!"⁶⁸

Two years later (1877), in answering the charge that Spencer's system supported a materialistic philosophy, Fiske's position was still substantially the same. He noticed that "among highly educated people, the belief in the continuance of conscious existence after death has visibly weakened during the present century." In so far as this weakening of belief could be attributed to "an imperfect apprehension of the scientific discoveries which our age has witnessed," he felt a word of caution was indicated. There were no "scientific proofs" for immortality, and there never had been. Such could not be furnished "until we have some actual experimental knowledge of soul as dissociated from body, and under the conditions of the present life no such knowledge can possibly be obtained."⁶⁹ This meant that we had neither proof for immortality nor any valid grounds for disproving it. The question was one that science could not answer. The most one could expect would be a continual restatement of provisional answers based on moral probability.⁷⁰

Fiske stated his own position in two parts. First, "I should be better satisfied with an affirmative answer, as affording perhaps some unforeseen solution to the general mystery of life."⁷¹ This

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 76.

⁶⁹ "A Crumb for the 'Modern Symposium,'" *Writings*, XX, 71-72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XX, 73.

⁷¹ *Idem.*

marks the direction in which his thought was to develop. On the other hand, he was not yielding his earlier position: "I cannot agree with those who consider a dogmatic belief in another life essential to the proper discharge of our duty in this."⁷² The real meaning of life was still to be found in the evolving meaning of the present scene.

Though we may not know what is to come hereafter, we have at any rate all the means of knowledge requisite for making our present lives pure and beautiful. It was Jehovah's cherished servant who declared in Holy Writ that his faith was stronger than death. There is something overwhelming in the thought that all our rich stores of spiritual acquisition may at any moment perish with us. But the wise man will cheerfully order his life, undaunted by the metaphysical snares that beset him; learning and learning afresh, as if all eternity lay before him—battling steadfastly for the right, as if this day were his last. "*Disce ut semper victurus, vive ut cras moriturus.*"⁷³

In *The Destiny of Man* (1884), his affirmative statement was more pronounced. He still felt that it was "not likely that we shall ever succeed in making the immortality of the soul a matter of scientific demonstration." On the grounds of "moral probability," however, he had "no doubt that men will continue to cherish the faith in a life beyond the grave."⁷⁴ What is more, he now felt that the philosophical position which he was advocating was one which had been historically associated with such a belief.

In past times the disbelief in the soul's immortality has always accompanied that kind of philosophy which, under whatever name, has regarded Humanity as merely a local incident in an endless and aimless series of cosmical changes. As a general rule, people who have come to take such a view of the position of Man in the universe have ceased to believe in a future life. On the other hand, he who regards Man as the consummate fruition of creative energy, and the chief object of Divine care, is almost irresistibly driven to the belief that the soul's career is not completed with the present life upon the earth.⁷⁵

⁷² *Idem.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, XX, 74.

⁷⁴ *The Destiny of Man, Writings*, XXI, 76, 78.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XXI, 78-79.

The teleology which evolution has shown to be at the very heart of the development of the cosmos reveals that the one great goal has been the "evolution of the most exalted spiritual qualities which characterize Humanity." The question of immortality, then, is reduced to this: "Are Man's highest spiritual qualities, into which all this creative energy has gone, to disappear. . . ? Has all this work been done for nothing? . . . Are we to regard the Creator's work as like that of a child, who builds houses out of blocks just for the pleasure of knocking them down?"⁷⁶ The answer of science is that it *may* be so. But Fiske insisted that he could "see no reason for believing any such thing." In such a view "the riddle of the universe becomes a riddle without a meaning." Faith in the "constancy of Nature" suggested, while it did not prove, the validity of belief in the "permanence of the spiritual element in man."⁷⁷ The earlier hint of the willingness to accept an affirmative answer as perhaps affording some "unforeseen solution to the mystery of life," had borne fruit in a rather positive assertion of belief. "For my own part," he wrote, "I believe in the immortality of the soul, not in the sense in which I accept the demonstrable truths of science, but as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work."⁷⁸ The preservation of the divine spark in Humanity from the inevitable wreck of material forms seemed to be "the fit climax to the creative work of God" as evidenced in the cosmic process of evolution.

In the essay *Through Nature to God* (1899), Fiske listed "The Undying Human Soul" as one of the three postulates of true religion. This postulate rested upon a prior assumption of kinship between God and the Human Soul, "the assumption that there is in Man a psychical element identical in nature with that which is eternal." An adequate theism had always been associated with a belief in the Soul's immortality; to subtract this second element would be to deprive theistic religion of one

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XXI, 80-81.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, XXI, 82.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, XXI, 81-82.

of its essential parts. "A theism deprived of this element would surely never be accepted as the equivalent of the theism entertained before."⁷⁹ The question, then, was whether or not a theism involving this postulate (as well as the other two postulates, "the Quasi-Human God" and "the ethical significance of the Unseen World") could be substantiated. By 1899 there was no doubt in Fiske's mind as to the answer. "Of all the implications of the doctrine of evolution with regard to Man, I believe the very deepest and strongest to be that which asserts the Everlasting Reality of Religion."⁸⁰ The same reasoning which had led him to accept the increasing validity of the human symbols for God, also led him increasingly to accept faith in immortality as a valid postulate.

In *Life Everlasting*, he treated the problem from the standpoint of this last position. While we may reject the older, inadequate representations of life after death, "the fact that primitive man misstated his relation to the Unseen World in no wise militates against the truth of his assumption that such a world exists for us."⁸¹ Can we go beyond this, and say something positive about the truth of the assumption? Fiske repeated his argument for the distinction between physical and psychical activity, and drew a conclusion which brought him very close to the position of idealism:

If consciousness is a product of molecular motion, it is a natural inference that it must lapse when the motion ceases. But if consciousness is a kind of existence which within our experience accompanies a certain phase of molecular motion, then the case is entirely altered, and the possibility or probability of the continuance of one without the other becomes a subject for further inquiry. Materialists sometimes declare the relation of conscious intelligence to the brain is like that of music to the harp, and when the harp is broken there can be no more music. An opposite view, long familiar to us, is that the conscious soul is an emanation from the Divine Intelligence that shapes and sustains the world, and during its temporary imprisonment in material forms the brain is its instrument of expression.

⁷⁹ *Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 354.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, XXI, 371.

⁸¹ *Life Everlasting, Writings*, XXI, 389.

Thus the soul is not the music, but the harper; and obviously this view is in harmony with the conclusions which I have deduced from the correlation of forces.⁸²

These arguments did not prove immortality, nor did they form a basis upon which such a proof could be established. They did, however, clear the field and prepare for "those general considerations of philosophic analogy and moral possibility upon which are all the guides which we can call for help in this arduous inquiry." For his own analogy, Fiske returned to his study of Nature.

The Maxim that Nature makes no leaps is far from true. Nature's habit is to make prodigious leaps, but only after long preparation. Slowly rises the water in the tank, inch by inch through many a weary hour, until at length it overflows and straightway vast systems of machinery are awakened into rumbling life. Slowly grows the eccentricity of the ellipse as you shift its position in the cone, and still the nature of the curve is not essentially varied, when suddenly, presto! one more little shift, and the finite ellipse becomes an infinite hyperbola mocking our feeble powers of conception as it speeds away on its everlasting career. Perhaps in our ignorance such analogies may help us to realize the possibility that steadily developing ephemeral conscious life may reach a critical point where it suddenly puts on immortality.⁸³

Viewed in this way, "there is no more philosophical difficulty in man's acquiring immortal life than in his acquiring the erect posture and articulate speech." Every vestige of conscious life, on whatever level, is but an "ephemeral adumbration of that which comes to maturity in Man," and, logically, of that which is yet to be attained by man. We are still within the realm of analogy, but on this level at least "the patient study of evolution is likely soon to supply the basis for a Natural Theology more comprehensive, more profound, and more hopeful than could formerly have been imagined." Among the facets of this Natural Theology will be belief in immortality. Unless all that we know of the "habits and methods of the cosmic process of Evolution"

⁸² *Ibid.*, XXI, 412.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 414-415.

is in error, then we can affirm—indeed, we must affirm—that such a belief is “based upon an eternal reality.”⁸⁴

As a philosopher of religion, Fiske represented a position which derived support from two traditions. The first, and the one which we believe was primary, was the tradition represented in his day by the Transcendentalists. Like Theodore Parker and others of this group, Fiske held that there were three basic intuitions of man to which the history of religion bore substantiating witness: the intuitions of the existence and nature of God, of the significance of the moral life, and of immortality. The second tradition to which he was indebted was that which arose out of the developing evolutionary science of his day. He tried to unite these two traditions in his own position by having the results of the latter support and, in a sense, give vindication to the convictions which were the fruits of the intuitions. This support had the nature of a double sanction. In the first place, evolution, as Fiske interpreted it, implied that the objective indication of the intuitive convictions had a “real” status. The existence of a “Power that makes for righteousness” was an assumption which was as valid from the standpoint of the scientists as it was from the standpoint of the religious believer. The importance of ethical living was testified to by the centrality of the moral faculties of man in the scheme of evolution, just as such living was indicated by the great religious teachings. Immortality seemed to be the indicated, logical conclusion of an evolutionary process which had come increasingly to stress the significance of the nonmaterial components of man’s nature.

In the second place, evolutionary science gave sanction to the intuitive convictions by showing that the capacity for these intuitions was the product of an age-long process. As such, this capacity appeared as the goal at which all of evolution had been aiming. Unless the cosmic process had no meaning whatsoever, these intuitions of man were not eccentric or false representations, but actually were indexes of reality. Man’s conviction of the

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, XXI, 415-416.

existence of a God who was not an alien to human personality, his conviction of the worth of ethical activity, and his conviction of the eternal nature of the human soul were seen as valid because the ability to have such convictions was the apex of the process which had been progressively revealing the true nature and meaning of the cosmos. It was only in his latest works, however, that Fiske arrived at any near-systematic statement of this position. Consequently his thought, throughout the major part of his life, presented a dual emphasis rather than a unitary position. As his interest centered in either of the two traditions he tended to emphasize that particular tradition to the exclusion of the other. His failure to make a more systematic statement prevented his conviction of the basic compatibility of the two traditions from becoming evident to his hearers and his readers. The "hints" of his later, more unified position which are to be found in his early works are insufficient to suggest Fiske's own real belief in the essential agreement of the approach to reality made by the liberal Christian thought of his day and the approach made by evolutionary science.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS UPON THE COSMIC DREAM

1. COSMISM: A RECONCILIATION OF RELIGION AND SCIENCE

The Cosmic Theism of John Fiske was rooted in an intuitive conviction about the significance of human life and consciousness. His philosophical system was designed primarily to present and defend that conviction within the categories of the scientific and philosophic thought of the second half of the nineteenth century. In his early works he tended to subordinate the conviction to the system of defense. In his later works the conviction emerged as a statement of faith to which true scientific arguments testified. Implicit throughout his thought was the assumption that both scientific investigation and religious intuition were valid avenues to the knowledge of reality. It was this assumption which gave to his thought an appearance of unity and which enabled him to remain so convinced that the truths revealed through science would be found to be consistent with the religious beliefs of man. In an age when the lines were sharply drawn between science and religion, and the advance of the former seemed to mean the defeat of the latter, Fiske was in the forefront among those who found in science religion's greatest ally rather than her most potent enemy. The evaluation of his influence and of his place in American religious thought must recognize both this bipolar approach to the interpretation of history and religion and his

tendency to emphasize either the intuitions or the verification as the interests of the times seemed to demand.

In 1874, in his commentary upon the Spencerian form of evolutionism and its relation to Christianity, Fiske wrote, "It is not merely that we refuse to attack Christianity because we recognize its necessary adaptation to a certain stage of culture, not yet passed by the average minds of the community; it is that we still regard Christianity as, in the deepest sense, our own religion."¹ Both the "intolerant hostility of the Infidel" and the "indifferent neutrality of the Positivist" were replaced in this new system by "cordial aid and sympathy." The faith which the scientist cherished and the faith which was Christianity were being "more and more fully identified." The constant element in Christianity, its underlying "spiritual principle," he found to remain unchanged in that religion whose symbols were being shaped by science. In the service of true religion, science was framing religious symbols in the "language of a man" to replace those framed in the "language of a child." In so doing, he said, it had not destroyed but had enriched the real essence of Christianity.²

The optimism which Fiske held concerning the philosophical possibilities of the theory of evolution, therefore, was really secondary to an optimism more deeply rooted concerning the meaning of the universe which science was trying to explain through the theory of evolution. This fact is even more pronounced when we examine his position in the light of the positions held by some of his contemporaries. On the one hand, there is the contrast between his constant avowal of the evolutionary principles of Spencer as supporting a theistic position and the fears of many of his theological contemporaries concerning the materialistic implications of Spencer's thought. On the other hand, there is the contrast between his insistence, as a student of science, upon the theistic implications of evolution and the more naturalistic conclusions which were arrived at by some of the leading

¹ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 364.

² *Ibid.*, XVI, 368.

American philosophers of his day. Between these extreme positions Fiske maintained a position which he thought did justice to both science and religion. In the early part of his life, when the scientific principle was the burning issue, his emphasis was upon its defense. In his later years, when evolution was generally accepted by scientists and theologians alike, his emphasis fell upon the defense of what he felt to be the cardinal truths of religion against the implications of atheism and materialism which others found in the reigning scientific thought. But his later defense never negated the principles of his earlier emphasis. At the very heart of the matter Fiske believed there was the truth to which both science and religion pointed; and it was the same truth for both. Science was valid to the extent to which it could exhibit this truth; religion became truer as the expressions of its convictions about this truth became more and more clarified by the increasing knowledge of man.

One of the major problems of the theist, according to Fiske, was that of making a place in the cosmic scheme for a God worthy of that designation. Spencer's philosophical system seemed to be an adequate way of answering that problem. To others, as, for example, Borden Parker Bowne (whose criticism of Spencer appeared in the same year as Fiske's *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*), Spencer's philosophy was a doctrine of "fatalism, materialism, atheism."³ It is true that Fiske's later position emphasizes a more humanistic approach to theism, and thus comes closer to Bowne's position,⁴ but Fiske could ground his later conclusions in the very thing which Bowne had rejected at the outset: that Mind was the "final outcome of nature—the highest point to which the atoms climb."⁵ Both thinkers came to accept a teleology which was expressing itself in an evolutionary manner,

³ B. P. Bowne, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer. Being an Examination of the First Principles of His System* (New York, 1874), p. 23.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 264: "The highest revelation of God is found, not in nature, but in those rare and noble souls which have been the pole-stars of the race. . . . We cannot but think that the goodness in us is a faint type of a goodness more august than our own."

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

but Bowne postulated his teleology at the beginning of his metaphysics, while Fiske tried to derive his from the implications of the scientific reading of the natural evolutionary process.⁶ Fiske's early enthusiasm for Positivism and Spencerianism was too strong to allow him to qualify them at the outset. His convictions about man were such that skepticism was not a real threat for him. He was willing to forego the uncertain proofs which the older arguments provided because he was convinced that more certain proofs were available to the devotee of science. The fact that he was able to arrive at an essentially theistic position through a method that was considered atheistical is witness to the conclusion that he brought to his acceptance of that method a conviction which the implications of positivism were unable to touch.⁷

This same fact is evident when we contrast Fiske's position with that of some of the philosophers who were gathering at Harvard in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Fiske was one of a group who formed an unofficial "Metaphysical Club" at Harvard in the 1860's and 1870's. Charles Sanders Peirce was the moving spirit of the group, which included William James, Chauncey Wright, Francis Ellingwood Abbot, Nicholas St. John Green, Fiske, and others.⁸ Peirce speaks of Fiske as attending

⁶ Bowne, *Philosophy of Theism* (New York, 1887), chap. ii, pp. 62 ff. It is interesting to note that in 1874 Bowne was denying the possibility of a theistic conclusion from the scientific considerations with which Fiske started his theistic system: ". . . while the effect of scientific study has been to magnify the extent and wonder of creation, it has also served to weaken faith in the existence of a Creator. . . . It is the student of science, the man best acquainted with its stupendous powers, and the ineffable perfection of its mechanism; it is this man who, though surrounded by the choicest tokens of a Divine Wisdom, first learns to suspect the absence of the Eternal Mind." Cf. Bowne, *Philosophy of Herbert Spencer*, pp. 222-223, and *Studies in Theism* (New York, 1880), p. 147.

⁷ Fiske, "Draper on Science and Religion," *Writings*, XVIII, 191-192: "Religious feelings have survived the heliocentric theory and the discoveries of geologists; and it will be none the worse for the establishment of Darwinism. It is the merest truism to say that religion strikes its roots deeper down into human nature than speculative opinion. . . . One good result of the doctrine of evolution . . . is the lesson that all our opinions must be held subject to continued revision, and that with none of them can our religious interests be regarded as irretrievably implicated." (The date of this essay is 1875.)

⁸ C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass., 1931-1935), Vol. V, paragraphs 12-13. See Peirce's letter to Mrs. Christine Ladd-Franklin in the latter's article, "Charles S.

the meetings but "holding aloof from any assent" to the conclusions reached.⁹ Philip Wiener suggests that the central concern of this group was the search for a method in "aid of philosophic inquiry."

Out of the cross-fire of their opinions about the prevailing claims of metaphysical and religious interpretations of evolution, one type of question emerged more clearly and urgently than all the rest: just *how* was one to proceed in thinking about the tangle of scientific, ethical, religious, and metaphysical ideas about evolution? It became clear to the founders of pragmatism in the midst of the momentous debate of their age that a rule of *method* was required for fixing one's beliefs, for making one's ideas clear, for testing intuitions, traditional and a priori modes of thinking, for verifying the fruitfulness and concrete bearings of all general ideas about thought and conduct in the light of their consequences for the sciences and for the welfare of man.¹⁰

Fiske shared this concern and his "aloofness," therefore, seems to be indicative of his disagreement with the skepticism with which the more "pragmatic" members concluded. His interpretation of Spencer and his positive attitude toward the Synthetic Philosophy ran counter to the enlightened skepticism that was characteristic of the group as a whole.¹¹ He was concerned that the new knowledge of man be emancipated from the traditional theological and metaphysical assumptions, and yet he was convinced that the proper study of evolution yielded support for his

Peirce," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method*, XIII (1916), 718-720.

⁹ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, V, 12. It was evidently this same group to which William James had reference in a letter to T. S. Perry in August of 1905. James complimented Perry on his proposed biography of "poor dear old John Fiske," and offered the following anecdote: ". . . when Chauncey Wright, Charles Peirce, St. John Green, [Joseph B.] Warner and I appointed an evening to discuss the 'Cosmic Philosophy,' just out, J. F. went to sleep under our noses" (*The Letters of William James*, edited by his son Henry James, Boston, 1926 [c. 1920], II, 233).

¹⁰ Wiener, *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*, pp. 26-27.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 130: "Fiske was not one of the founders of pragmatism, though there are elements in his thinking which he shared with his contemporary pragmatic friends at Cambridge: a liberal respect for individual freedom and a faith that the growth of freedom could be promoted in society by the progress and diffusion of science, especially the theory of evolution. He differed from the early pragmatists in clinging to Spencer's mechanical evolutionism, though . . . he even gave that doctrine the richer coloring of his own more liberal and more Christian idealism."

cosmic theism which, as we have seen, had metaphysical content. Wiener observes that Fiske left unclear his answer to "whether scientific method can verify the existence of such an evolutionary goal [that is "the supersensuous world of 'unknowable' noumena"] or simply say nothing to contravene one's faith in it as an unknowable noumenon."¹² Josiah Royce suggests that the latter answer is more nearly correct.

But did Fiske ever find and express a sufficient positive and rational warrant for his faith? I do not think so; and he himself would have been the last to assert that he had completely done so. Faith with him remained faith—illuminated by its very contrast with science, strengthened by all the results of that search for clearness which his studies exemplified, purified by its abandonment of conventional dogmas.¹³

When we remember, however, that it was not the psychological act of faith that was Fiske's concern, but the tendency to define objectively the object of faith, we see that the problem of the "proof" really presupposes the "faith." It was not a problem of whether or not man should believe in the metaphysical reality of God; rather it was the dual question of what human symbols best expressed the nature of God and how we arrive at those symbols. Fiske's revolt against orthodoxy was a revolt against inadequate and inaccurate symbolization. The scientific method, with its analysis of the world and of man, provided the opportunity for the revision of those symbols until they were more consonant with the Deity.¹⁴ Fiske shared, therefore, only a part of the interest of his more pragmatic friends. Peirce spoke of the procedure at the "Metaphysical Club" as that of "rather scrutinizing the doctrines of the metaphysicians on their scientific

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹³ Royce, "John Fiske as Thinker," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, X, 33.

¹⁴ Thus Fiske said that the answer to the question of whether man's belief in the essential reasonableness of the universe answers "to any outward reality" is essentially a problem of the "impossibility of framing a representative conception of the Deity." The danger in the attempt to answer the question is not to be found in the attempt to indicate Deity, but in "framing illegitimate symbols that answer to nothing in heaven or earth" (*The Idea of God. Writings*, XXI, 189-190, 193).

side than regarding them as very momentous spiritually."¹⁵ Fiske was interested in the scrutiny and the criticism of the doctrines, but his interest was colored by the conviction that correct scientific analysis did have metaphysical significance.

Fiske's position at this point stands out clearly in his criticisms of William James and Chauncey Wright. James had criticized the Spencerian philosophy of evolution as "a metaphysical creed, and nothing else." It was not scientific, he said, but drew its "vital breath from a region which—whether above or below—is at least altogether different from that in which science dwells."¹⁶ The basis of this criticism was Spencer's denial of the "vital importance of individual initiative" in making the individual a resultant of society. James's conclusion was that "If anything is humanly certain it is that the great man's society, properly so called, does *not* make him before he can remake it."¹⁷ The environment of such men acted upon them only in a way parallel to the action of the environment upon a variation in the Darwinian system; that is, it "selected" the man, but it did not make him.¹⁸ Fiske agreed with this latter point. Both zoological and sociological variations could be described as "deviations from an average" which are severally unaccountable.¹⁹ Spencer never asserted, he said, that the causes that make communities change go on irrespective of persons, and are independent of individual, human control.²⁰ However, mere attention to individuals was not enough.

If it be true that a genius of a given kind can appear under certain social conditions, and not under others . . . ; or if it be true that a given genius can work out its results under certain social conditions, and not under others . . . ; then it follows that in order to understand the course of history from age to age the mere study of the personal characteristics and achievements of great men is not sufficient.²¹

¹⁵ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, V, 12.

¹⁶ James, "Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment," *Atlantic Monthly*, XLVI (Oct., 1880), 458, 459.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XLVI, 449.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XLVI, 445.

¹⁹ Fiske, "Sociology and Hero-Worship," *Writings*, XIX, 158.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XIX, 164-165.

²¹ *Ibid.*, XIX, 174-175.

Fiske's criticism of James, therefore, was a criticism of method; but, more than that, it was a criticism of the implications which James read into his method. Great men did have their effect, but, as eccentric individuals, they could not explain the course of events.²² For this explanation we are forced to turn to those "general truths relating to the structure of society and the functions of its various parts" which are derived from an analytical survey of the actions of man. And that survey was to be made on a scale "where all matters of individual idiosyncracy are averaged, and for the purpose of inquiry eliminated."²³ The general course of social evolution could be charted from these general truths, although specific, short-term predictions were not possible. The explanation of the universe of social phenomena, in Fiske's view, admitted of more attention to ultimate causes than was permissible under the more empiricistic approach of James. It is true that Fiske believed the pattern of these causes was discernible through the study of the evolutionary process, but that same study revealed a unity behind the multiplicity of phenomena which gave meaning to the process itself and, to some extent at least, to all individual variations within the process. The search for proximate causes did not negate the validity of belief in an ultimate cause. James was close to being right, therefore, when he characterized this position as a falling back on the gods; an "emotional attitude, . . . with its intuitions of the One and All, which was and is, and ever shall be, and from whose womb each single thing proceeds."²⁴ But while James suggested that this attitude was not scientific in any sense, Fiske argued that it was just this which was the basis of scientific investigation. The real mark of scientific procedure was not the denial of the

²² *Ibid.*, XIX, 175: "Without the least disrespect to the memories of the great statesmen of Greece and Rome, it may safely be said that one might learn all of 'Plutarch's Lives' by heart, and still have made very little progress toward comprehending the reasons why the Greek states were never able to form a coherent political aggregate, or why the establishment of despotism at Rome was involved in the conquest of the Mediterranean world."

²³ *Ibid.*, XIX, 176.

²⁴ James, *op. cit.*, *Atlantic Monthly*, XLVI, 458-459.

metaphysical reality to the Cause, but the refusal to characterize that reality in unverifiable terms.

. . . the process of scientific generalization, which underlies the evolution of philosophy from epoch to epoch, is characterized not by the elimination of these agencies, but by their integration into a single Agency, from which the anthropomorphic attributes are stripped, and which is regarded as revealed in and through the Cosmos.²⁵

The insistence of James that, since great men remake society before society makes them, the clue to society must be the study of great men was unacceptable to Fiske because he saw it as an example of the fallacy of limiting truth to individual, demonstrable phenomenon. Fiske himself was not willing to make that limitation. While the supreme Agency behind all phenomena was unknowable, the postulation of the existence of such an Agency was the prior necessity to the understanding of the phenomena themselves.

This same conviction in Fiske's thought appeared in an article which he wrote on Chauncey Wright soon after the latter's death in 1875. He first paid tribute to Wright's consistent empirical position. "His opinions were determined only by direct evidence, and to this he always accorded a hospitable reception. A mind more placid in its working, more unalloyed by emotional prejudice or less solicited by the various temptations of speculation, I have never known."²⁶ But Fiske did not agree with the conclusions to which Wright's empiricism led him: to the "condemnation of cosmic or synthetic systems of philosophy as metaphysical 'anticipations of Nature,' incompatible with the true spirit of Baconism."²⁷

²⁵ Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 270.

²⁶ Fiske, "Chauncey Wright," *Writings*, XX, 80. On Wright's "neutral" and "nihilistic" method of naturalistic empiricism, see Wiener, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 ff. Cf. [James], "Chauncey Wright," *Nation*, XXI (Sept. 23, 1875), 194: "Never in a human head was contemplation more separated from desire. . . . Whereas most men's interest in a thought is proportioned to its possible relation to human destiny, with him it is the reverse. When the mere actuality of phenomena will suffice to describe them, he held it pure excess and superstition to speak of a metaphysical whence or whither, of a substance, a meaning, or an end."

²⁷ Fiske, "Chauncey Wright," *Writings*, XX, 82.

He [Wright] would have argued that the stupendous group of events which we call the universe consists so largely of unexplored, or even unsuspected, phenomena that the only safe generalizations we can make concerning it must needs be eminently fragmentary; and if any one had asked whether, after all, we have not great reason to believe that throughout the length and breadth and duration of the boundless and endless universe there is an all prevading coherency of action, such as would be implied in the theorem that all Nature is the manifestation of one Infinite Power, —to any such question he would probably have held that no legitimate answer can be given.²⁸

Fiske felt that it was this “general way of looking at things” which accounted for Wright’s persistent hostility to the Spencerian philosophy.²⁹ He undertook, therefore, an explanation of Spencer’s meaning and to point out what he considered to be the misconception on the part of Wright. He began with the point upon which both Spencer and Wright agreed: “Our faith in the constancy of Nature results . . . from our inability to overcome or ‘go behind’ the certified testimony of experience.” But Fiske saw two ways of interpreting this fact, and found in the confusion of these two ways the source of misunderstanding.

²⁸ *Idem*. Cf. p. 98: “He went as far as it was possible for a human thinker to go toward a philosophy which should take no note of anything beyond the content of observed facts. He always kept the razor of Occam uncased and ready for use, and was especially fond of applying it to such entities as ‘substance’ and ‘force,’ the very names of which, he thought, might advantageously be excluded from philosophical terminology.”

²⁹ Fiske had in mind Wright’s criticism of Spencer in an article in the *Nation* published just a few days before Wright’s death. In the article Wright had charged that Spencer’s thoughts “were really theological in origin, and have never departed from the theological standpoint.” Spencer’s designation of the “metaphysical object” as unknowable was really paralleled in the attitude of the “converted savage . . . towards the powers and attributes of the idols, which his reason has come to pronounce no other in fact than common blocks or stones”: it does not destroy the belief in the idols; it merely changes the designation of them. The only truly scientific answer is to destroy the “blocks.”

Thus Spencer’s use of “force” to refer to an “incognizable substratum of causation,” when actually force had reference only to “various measurably interchangeable forms of material movement and antecedent conditions of movement (wholly phenomenal),” did not save the system from being metaphysical. The law of the conservation of force was a mechanical law which had merits of truth only in the “clear, distinct, precise, though technical meaning in science,” arrived at through “experimental and mathematical research.” To apply the law, therefore, to “all sorts of changes—to ‘movements’ of society, for example,” was to revert to metaphysics, whatever name was given to the procedure by Spencer and his disciples. (C. Wright, “German Darwinism,” *Nation*, XXI, Sept. 9, 1875, 168-169).

First, there was the alternative favored by Wright: ". . . our belief in the constancy of Nature may be the result of an immense induction or counting up of the whole series of events which show that Nature is not capricious." On the other hand, such a belief might be the "generalization of a simple assumption which we make in every act of experience." The latter was the position of Spencer, and Fiske found it personally "more profound and satisfactory."³⁰ The two positions did not have to be antagonistic, however. They could be viewed as complementary or obverse aspects of the same fundamental truth. In one sense our belief in the constancy of Nature was the "net result of experience." That is, all our experiences testified to the conclusion that the order of Nature could be relied on. Fiske insisted that in another sense, however, "not one of this series of experiences can have any validity, or indeed any existence, unless the constancy of Nature be tacitly assumed to begin with." It was the necessary postulate without which no act of experience could have validity or meaning.³¹ He insisted that this did not mean a desertion of science for metaphysics. Indeed, argument over that problem merely clouded the issue, and for all practical purposes could be dispensed with.

Whether our belief in the uniformity of Nature be a primary datum for rational thinking or a net result of all induction, or whether . . . we prefer to call it an expression of trust that the Deity 'will not put us to permanent intellectual confusion,'—whichever alternative we adopt, our theories of the universe will be pretty much the same in the end, provided we content ourselves with a simple scientific coördination of the phenomena before us.³²

But this gesture of objective indifference on the part of Fiske was only temporary. The limitation of man's thought posed an additional problem. A simple scientific co-ordination of phenomena was not a sufficient answer. When we have exhausted the "tiny area" which is open to our exploration and find

³⁰ Fiske, "Chauncey Wright," *Writings*, XX, 85-86.

³¹ *Ibid.*, XX, 88-89.

³² *Ibid.*, XX, 90.

everywhere within this area "coherency of causation," then "just because we are incapable of transcending experience, we cannot avoid attributing further coherency to the regions beyond our ken. . . ." ³³ The limitations under which thinking is carried on urge us to seek the One in the Many. "Yet, if our words are rightly weighed, this does not imply a striving after 'systematic omniscience,' nor can any theistic conception which confines itself within these limits of inference be properly stigmatized as contrary to the spirit of science." ³⁴ These limits of inference were to grow in Fiske's developing thought, but even in 1876 he was suggesting that "dramatic completeness" was not the sole property of metaphysicians, but could be found in "doctrines that rightly lay claim to scientific competence." ³⁵ In refutation of Wright's description of the "lack of coherency" among cosmic events as "cosmical weather" Fiske revealed the real tendency of his thought:

The phrase "cosmical weather" happily comports with our enormous ignorance of the real tendency of events. But as terrestrial weather is after all subject to discoverable laws, so to an intelligence sufficiently vast the appearance of fickleness in "cosmical weather" would no doubt cease, and the sequence of events would doubtless begin to disclose a dramatic tendency, though whether toward any end appreciable by us or not it would be difficult to say. ³⁶

Fiske was convinced that there was a unity and orderliness to reality to which empirical observation bore witness, but which was not limited to phenomenal restrictions. He praised Wright for his incisive criticism of the "crude species of theism which represents the Deity as a power outside the universe which coerces

³³ *Ibid.*, XX, 91.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, XX, 91-92.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, XX, 94.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XX, 97-98. Fiske advanced beyond this position in his later thought. In *The Idea of God* he wrote that as the "phenomenal fact" of the unity of Nature became clearer to man, "so must their grasp upon the noumenal truth behind it [that is, the unity of God,] become firmer" (*Writings*, XXI, 194). Involved in this Unity of God was the conviction of the reasonableness of the universe: "that in the orderly sequence of events there is a meaning which appeals to our human intelligence." Thus the "end" revealed by our advancing knowledge not only is "appreciable by us" but is seen as designed to give the highest possibility of development to man's intellectual and spiritual powers (*ibid.*, XXI, 203, 208 ff.).

it into orderly behaviour."³⁷ But Fiske found in evolution evidence of purpose which spoke of reasonableness in the universe and of meaning in the orderly sequence of events. His criticism of such theism was of the method employed, not of the metaphysical object designated. While experience verified the theistic and metaphysical convictions (and it was this element of verification which distinguished cosmic from anthropomorphic theism), Fiske still insisted that in the absence of that conviction no experience meant anything or had any value. In contrast, therefore, to both the idealistic, theistic position of Bowne and the empiricistic, skeptical positions of James and Wright, Fiske steered a course which attempted to do justice to both the intuitive religious convictions of man and the findings of science. His refusal to follow his scientific contemporaries into skepticism or agnosticism suggests that his basic metaphysical position was linked to some kind of a priorism. The scientific influence was too strong, however, to permit him to stop there. Convinced as he was that ultimately there was only one truth for both positions, he dedicated himself to the task of showing how the apparent contradictions could be resolved and how science could be used to support the intuitive convictions. His labors were confined largely to two areas, the study of history and religion. In the former he sought to show how the evolutionary interpretation of the facts of history supported man's convictions about progress and the nature of the destined society. In the latter he attempted to prove, through a study of the evolutionary development of man's psychical powers, that the God-consciousness of man, his ethical sensitivity, and his desire for immortality, were all valid indicators of reality. The remainder of our work will be an appraisal of these two attempts.

II. INTUITIONS OF PROGRESS AND HISTORICAL PROCESS

The evolutionary interpretation of history, wrote Fiske, is a "new way of treating history" which will make history reveal

³⁷ "Chauncey Wright," *Writings*, XX, 99.

its truths.³⁸ But his confidence in the possibilities of this new principle of interpretation was secondary to his convictions about the pattern of progress which was to be found in the movement of history. It was this primary conviction which led him to the study of history and to the attempt to establish the conviction through the use of a method of interpretation dictated by "the dispassionate spirit of science."³⁹ Eight years before the first of his formal works in history was published, he spoke of his faith in history as an account of the "ultimate triumph of good over evil."⁴⁰ This faith—that historical process was also a pattern of progress—was to influence his interpretation of the process. He used his "new way of treating history" primarily to give "scientific" sanction to man's intuitive convictions about the meaning of history. The essence of these convictions was the belief of the individual immersed in the process that history meant something in terms of man's destiny. His quarrel with earlier theistic interpretations centered in the fact that they had given the wrong explanation for the conviction—not that they had defended the wrong position. Progress was real, and progress had meaning in terms of human values; but it was not the result of the superimposed designing and contriving will of a Deity. The real impulse to progress was a product of a long growth discernible in the facts of evolution, the product of the same process which had produced in man the convictions about progress and meaning. The trained historian would turn to this agelong growth in adjustments between the individual and his environment and find there the true story of history, a movement governed by the universal law of evolution and as available to scientific statement as any arrangement of physical phenomena could be. Purposiveness in the process was not denied. The whole of creation was the working out of a grand teleology which focused on man. But purpose was not an explanation; it was

³⁸ Fiske, "Old and New Ways of Treating History," *Essays Historical and Literary*, II, 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 23.

⁴⁰ *American Political Ideas*, pp. 151-152.

a result. The meaning of history, therefore, was to be read *from* history through the window of evolutionary science, not *into* history by the imposition of dogmas derived in an *a priori* way. It is significant for the understanding of Fiske's philosophical position, however, to note that his "scientific" conclusions in this area came increasingly to be identified with the conclusions which had arisen in the liberal Christian tradition of the early nineteenth century. His theory of parallelism enabled him to argue that the reading of the historical facts yielded not only a story of progress but also testified to the validity of the indicative ability of the individual's "states of consciousness," which had strong similarities to religious intuitions concerning the destiny of man.

This attempted identification of the facts of historical process and the convictions arising out of man's subjective states of consciousness gave to Fiske's approach to the philosophy of history a bipolar character. The result was that his presentation suffered from a considerable lack of clarity and definitive statement. He never came to rest upon a clear answer to the question of whether the "truths" of history derived from an analysis of the arrangement of phenomenal events or from an understanding of the implications of man's consciousness concerning an absolute order paralleling these phenomenal events in a transphenomenal world. The ambiguity of his thought at this point did not seem to be of concern to Fiske himself. He insisted that the truths arrived at were the same, regardless of the approach. He attempted to justify this insistence through a theory of truth which claimed to be a synthesis of the empirical "experience-test" and the idealistic or rationalistic "inconceivability-test." Our analysis of his thought has suggested that his idealistic convictions were really primary. The trouble arose when he attempted to justify those convictions by a rigid empiricism, while holding that they were exempt from certain mechanistic and naturalistic implications of that philosophical system.

This bipolarity in the interpretation of history is evident in three areas: (a) in Fiske's idea of the nature of history; (b) in his discussions concerning the source of motivation in history, and in the formulation of his principle of causation and conclusions about the efficacy of causal effort; and (c) in his union of facts and values in history which identified process with progress and equated the evolutionary development of events with the creation of the Kingdom of God.

(a) Fiske's idea of the nature of history can best be seen in his reaction to Comte's idea of the three stages of history. He credited Comte with being the first to bring into prominence the idea of "a philosophy of history which should also be the history of philosophy."⁴¹ Comte's position was seen as a "dynamical view" which had two values. It "proclaimed that we must found our general conception of the world and our plans for social amelioration upon a synthesis of special scientific truths, . . . and not upon the congeries of theological dogma"; and it reminded us that "we cannot ignore the past, or treat it with contumely." To attempt to construct a philosophy "*de novo*, out of abstract principles, without reference to the concrete facts of past history, is simply to build a castle in the air."⁴² Fiske saw in Comte's law of the three stages, therefore, a valid but inadequate attempt to suggest the correct method for the construction of a philosophy of history.

In spite of his hostility to the Doctrine of Evolution, in most of the forms in which he came into contact with it as technically stated, Comte was nevertheless thoroughly inspired by the comparative method, so far as the study of history was concerned. As far as was possible with his

⁴¹ Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 245. Cf. ". . . to Comte is due the grand and luminous conception of a historic development of thought, from the earliest to the latest ages of human speculative activity" (*Idem*). It cannot escape notice that Fiske apparently ignored Hegel's position in this matter when he gave credit to Comte for discovering the idea. This may be written off simply as a scholarly *faux pas* on Fiske's part. See Royce's note, *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 244, n. 1. It may, however, also be partially attributable to Fiske's bipolar emphasis. What Fiske meant is not just the Absolute unfolding itself in man's consciousness, but, viewed from the standpoint of the totality of man's development, an adjustment to phenomenal events in a time sequence.

⁴² *Ibid.*, XVI, 339-340.

slender scientific resources, he looked at human affairs with the eye of an evolutionist.⁴³

Comte's method was nearly correct. But beyond this point Fiske departed from Comte's statement. The application of the three stages as indicating the intellectual development of mankind was "correct in so far as it asserts that the prevailing conception of the world becomes less and less anthropomorphic from age to age."⁴⁴ The thing which Fiske found incorrect in Comte's statement was the assertion that in this deanthropomorphizing process there were three radically distinguishable stages, and that the ultimate end of the process was Positivism. Comte's misreading of the process of history had resulted, therefore, in an erroneous conclusion about the nature and end of history. The unity of man's intellectual development was founded, for Fiske, upon the necessity of interpreting all phenomena in terms of man's consciousness. The "subjective feelings" of man were the only materials with which a conception could be framed, and that was true whether we gave "a theological, a metaphysical, or a scientific explanation" of the phenomena. The specific conception, in a particular age, might be either the "crude conception of an arbitrary volition," or the "refined conception of a uniformly conditioned force"; but however we interpreted it, the consciousness of force was there at the root of the conception.⁴⁵ Fiske felt that Comte, in overlooking this psychological fact, was prevented from seeing that even the final scientific conception could not be framed unless there was postulated an "unconditioned Power existing independently of consciousness, to which no limit is conceivable in time or space, and of which all phenomena, as known to us, are manifestations."⁴⁶ The recognition of this fact (that the "existence of such a Power" is the "obverse of our self-consciousness") revealed the real fallacy in the three stages idea. The conception formed in each stage was symbolic of the same "eternal fact." The Positive stage as defined by Comte, a stage

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XVI, 328.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, 254.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, XV, 349-350.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII, 255.

wherein there would be "non-recognition of the absolute and infinite Power," was "simply an impossibility." It never did exist and it never would.⁴⁷

Fiske's criticism of Comte's statement of the intellectual history of man, therefore, was really a criticism based upon the observed failure in Comte to permit interpretation from the standpoint of man's subjective "states of consciousness." There was an idealistic conviction present in Fiske's thought which insisted that "history" was man's history; that is, *any* interpretation of history had to be oriented first of all to man's consciousness, and secondarily only to the observable phenomenal aspects of history. This fact makes clear the nature of Fiske's criticism of Comte's statement of the "material development of mankind." In Comte's thought the transition from the theological, through the metaphysical, to the positive conceptions was paralleled by an advance from military, through legal, to industrial life.⁴⁸ Fiske stated this "double formula of Comte's law of progress," reduced to its "lowest terms" as, "The process of society is a gradual change from anthropomorphic to positive conceptions of the world, and from military to industrial modes of life; and the latter kind of change is determined by the former."⁴⁹ He acknowledged the validity of the observation of the change from military to industrial modes. He had no quarrel with the general portrayal of historical development. Nor did he find any basic fault in saying that the "material development" was determined by the "intellectual development." He felt, however, that Comte's definition of the "intellectual development" resulted in the denial of the one thing which gave unity to history and ended consequently with a misinterpretation of the nature of history. In other words, the one obvious, and fatal, defect in the Comtean formula was not what it asserted, but what it omitted. That defect was the "total omission of moral feeling as a factor in social

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 258-259.

⁴⁸ Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, II, 173-176.

⁴⁹ Fiske, *Writings*, XV, 353. This quotation is italicized in the original.

evolution." We cannot, said Fiske, "explain all social progress as due simply to the alteration of opinion." Civilization was not only a process of intellectual adaptation; it was also a process of moral adaptation, and the latter was the more fundamental of the two.⁵⁰

Implicit in this criticism of Comte, and of Positivism in general, was this bipolarity which we have noticed. Fiske found nothing wrong with Comte's empirical description of the events of history. What he did object to was the fact that Comte had overlooked the subjective aspect of history. History was more than phenomenal events. The explanation of history was not exhausted when we had pointed to stages of militarism and industrialism. The real explanation was to be found in the parallel "intellectual" development. But "intellectual" included the total series of the states of consciousness of man. What history meant, therefore, was really to be answered by discovering what the states of consciousness indicated. Fiske wanted to make the stages of history the results of a long series of adjustments within the consciousness of man. On the one hand, history was just an unpredictable series of phenomenal events, considered in themselves; on the other, it was a result of a series of states of consciousness, the nature of which determined both the individual stages and the general nature of history.⁵¹ He tried to hold these two definitions in balance; he was not willing to accept one to the exclusion of the other. He tried to unite them by making the empirical reading substantiate the implications of the consciousness, but his treatment of this was far from consistent. When he argued for the empirical substantiation, for example, he seemed to forget that, according to his total system, that argument was relevant to a method of proof only, and to the reader he sounds very close to the positivism which he condemned.

When we take his thought as a whole, however, the primary

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XV, 353, 355.

⁵¹ These states determine the stages inasmuch as the higher the adjustment, the more "moral" the stage; they determined the general nature by showing the meaning of the end which, in turn, reveals the meaning of the process.

idealistic emphasis is evident. What he meant by "past" history was really "the more limited or narrower adjustments" of the consciousness of man, reflecting a limited environment.⁵² The "future" was not primarily a series of events in future time. It was a stage defined basically in terms of wider adjustments. Prediction of the future was to be understood in the same way. It was not to be based upon an empirical analysis of events and a consequent projection of the observable tendencies (although Fiske implied and, at times, came close to saying, that such projection would be accurate).⁵³ Prediction was based upon the implications of man's states of consciousness. The progressive development of the higher attributes in man insured the direction, and to an extent, the limits, of history. The nature of history—what it is and what it means, past and future—was explained not by an analysis of empirical events, but by psychological analysis of man's developing consciousness. History, like thought, moves from Anthropomorphism to Cosmism. The end of history, the Kingdom of God, is really best described as the state in which man's attributes respond to the widest possible community, a response which includes a religious attitude toward an environment wide enough to include God. The Fiskean optimism spoke so convincingly to the mass of "emerging Americans" because it so easily identified an indicated peaceful, industrial democracy with the religious ideal of the Kingdom of God. But the identification was made possible for Fiske, as it was for many of his hearers, because the liberal spirit had already convinced him that the consciousness of man was the most valid index of reality. The efforts of free men, aided somewhat illogically by a mechanistic

⁵² For example, "savagery" or "barbarism" are really best explained in terms of limited community and environment: that is, as "adjustments" to such limited areas.

⁵³ For example, Fiske, in his historical works, traced the movements of men and events, confident that the pattern thus observed was the pattern of "history." The movement from savagery through barbarism to civilization, the change from militarism to industrialism, the emergence of the federal type of political government—all of these observable sociological phenomena he saw as the development of history. They all pointed to the formation of a society which would be the phenomenal equivalent of the inner states of consciousness in man.

cosmos, could create and were creating a society which was indicated by the noblest visions of Humanity.

(b) The theory of the relativity of knowledge prevented Fiske from making any specific designation of the ultimate Power behind the phenomenal world. Like Kant, he thought that in order to get scientific certainty, knowledge of anything beyond phenomena had to be sacrificed. For the philosophy of history this meant, or should have meant, that causative effort had to be oriented to this phenomenal world. At times Fiske was content with this position. Causation was defined as "the unconditional invariable sequence of one event, or concurrence of events, upon another."⁵⁴ He did not deny that there was a "persistent belief" that causation implied something more than invariable sequence, but this belief was the result of the necessity of the formulation of "our conception of the Power which is manifested in the sequence of external phenomena, in terms of that Power which is alone directly known to us in consciousness."⁵⁵ The Power was not known in phenomenal relations. We could see its effects, but in itself it was not known. The attempt to detect a "hidden energy" in the act of causation was an anthropomorphization of "that universal Protean Power, of whose multitudinous effects we are cognizant in the sequence of events, but which in its secret nature must ever mockingly elude our grasp."⁵⁶

But Fiske was not consistent on this point. Knowledge of the reality of causation was relative to human intelligence,⁵⁷ and Fiske had too much confidence in the validity of the indicative ability of human consciousness to stop with knowledge of "sequence" only. This is evident in the criticism of Comte. A formula of development which ended in Positivism was unacceptable because it involved the tacit denial that the "Power underlying and sustaining the world of phenomena" had anything significant to do with the emergence of a higher society. Inas-

⁵⁴ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XIII, 227.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, 231.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII, 238.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 218.

much as this higher society would be the result of adjustments to an environment including that Power, we must postulate its presence. Not only that, but in so far as adjustment also meant knowledge, that Power became increasingly knowable. Since man's highest adjustments are on the level of the moral attributes, we are led to an eventual definition of the source of causation in history as the "Power which makes for righteousness." But we may well question the process of reasoning which Fiske employed to arrive at that definition and at the assurance of its accuracy. In the realm where the two factors in the physical-psychical parallelism are phenomenal events and the lower states of consciousness, we know what is relatively true, because we know that the inconceivability test (individually viewed) is also the experience test (when mankind is viewed as a whole). But as we go up the scale of the states of consciousness, Fiske wanted to make the experience test affirm the validity of our moral tendencies and the inconceivability test affirm the reality and nature of a Being which was outside the phenomenal world, a world to which the experience test is limited. What actually happened was that Fiske attempted to sustain his idealistic conviction about the validity of the ultimate indication of man's states of consciousness by suggesting that the same psychological process which operates in connection with the phenomenal world continues to operate in connection with the transphenomenal world. This would have solved his problem of unity, to be sure, but it is an illicit position since he had already accepted a theory which presupposes the relativity of knowledge. All we can know are states of consciousness, and they are derived from evolutionary adjustments to phenomena.⁵⁸

Fiske's ambiguity here, however, leads us to conclude that what he really wanted causation to mean was not just meaningless sequence, but purposive continuity. The purpose involved was

⁵⁸ Fiske was not unaware of the difficulty here. From time to time, even in his later works, he insisted upon the illegitimacy of his own "anthropomorphizing" of the Ultimate Being. But this insistence carried little weight in his arguments.

God's purpose, if by "God" we mean the Being indicated by man's consciousness. The outcome of man's historical efforts would be the same as God's plan for humanity. The only assurance which he had for that conclusion was his own intuitive conviction that historical process was primarily the account of the realization of man's belief about his destiny—belief which included the essentially religious attitude that man's highest aspirations were not alien to Divine purpose. His confidence in the psychological process which produced that belief is witness to the fact that, for him, scientific verification was not the final test of what was true in history. He wrote with assurance about the reality of an Ultimate Cause, beyond the reach of empirical perception, who was shaping events toward a noble destiny for man. For that assurance he relied, finally, upon intuitions which needed no justification beyond their own presence in the believing mind.

(c) Fiske's identification of the Being indicated by man's highest attributes and the "Power which makes for righteousness" led him to an identification of "facts" and "values" in history which was more intuitive than scientific. Cosmic history was seen to be essentially a development or realization of ethical value—a progress toward the society which was indicated by man's developing ethical consciousness. But according to his own admission, scientific observation could yield nothing more than orderly sequence, or process. That process was seen to mean progress only when, translated into states of consciousness, it indicated the fulfilment of man's ethical and religious aspirations. That fulfilment or realization would be paralleled by the creation of the ethical or religious attributes within man. If Fiske meant to say that these attributes, and their consequent social expressions, are the results of evolutionary phenomenal development (as the ideas of parallelism and adjustment would suggest), then he has made evolution the "God" of history. The process gives meaning to itself, and he is warranted in finding no more ethical value in the process than observation of phenomenal sequence will yield. But Fiske did not always hold that the phenomenal development

preceded the creation of the attributes. Indeed, the highest and best society is really the result, not the cause, of man's inner adjustments on that level. For example, an altruistic society is impossible without the sympathy which is the response of consciousness to increased family relations. In a broader sense, the value of history itself is to be found in the fact that the whole process has eventuated in a society which is increasingly in harmony with man's aspirations. The "value" is defined with reference to man's ethical consciousness, rather than with reference to the society itself. Man's ethical intuitions, therefore, are value-bearing or value-producing, and the value is limited only by the indications of the intuitions themselves.

Fiske tried to hold to both of these positions. He insisted that the empirically observable facts confirmed the intuitions, but he did not limit the content of the intuitions to phenomenal manifestations. The contradiction was resolved in his own thought because he assumed that the process which he observed and the aspirations which were the fruits of the intuitions were alike expressive of God's purpose. Phenomena were manifestations of God; the forming of society, therefore, was a working out of this purpose. Man's ethical attributes were responses to these manifestations and indicated future (and even nonphenomenal) developments of them. The gesture toward the exclusion of teleology never became an accomplished fact; actually, the teleology in the historical process explained history and gave meaning to history. Fiske's ambiguity was the result of his holding intuitively to the metaphysical reality of a purposeful Deity while trying to show that man did not need to know anything about purpose on the metaphysical level to prove that history was an account of progress. But method alone cannot wring value out of valueless facts or sequences. Fiske never proved that it could, and his grand conclusion that the Humanity which evolution was producing was just what the Deity expected as citizenry for the Kingdom of God was an assertion of faith, prepared for by the

conviction that "evolution" was just another name for "God's way of doing things."

In conclusion, Fiske actually implied three different definitions of history. As an empiricist he saw it as the process of phenomenal events which as such had no observable necessary connection. As an idealist he saw history as the phenomenal correlate of man's inner states of consciousness. As a liberal Christian believer he believed history to be the purposeful creation (through evolution) of a Deity who was responsible both for the order of phenomena and the states of consciousness in man. His refusal to limit the Deity to the warranted implications of man's consciousness was theoretical only, a concession to the Christian sense of "mystery," which had no relevance whatever to what God was doing in history.

III. RELIGIOUS FAITH AND SCIENTIFIC PROOF

As a religious thinker Fiske was indebted to Immanuel Kant for the emphasis upon the primacy of the practical reason in religious knowledge. The "Unknowable," in Fiske's thought, was, practically speaking, Kant's *thing-in-itself*; that is, it stood outside the realm of understanding. But Fiske modified this Kantian position in two ways. First, his pantheistic tendency led him to assert that the Deity was knowable "insofar as manifested in phenomena." The evolutionary adjustments of the race—past, present, and future—decrease the area of the unknowable. Second, Fiske took seriously Kant's moral argument for the existence of God, combined it rather uncritically with Schleiermacher's concept of religious feeling, and, employing the idea of adjustment which the studies of evolution gave him, emerged with a theory of religious knowledge, a basis for ethics, and an assurance of immortality.

There can be no question that much of Fiske's popularity as a lecturer and writer arose from his insistence upon the ability of man to hold, more firmly and surely than before, to these three basic postulates of religion. His union of the liberal

optimism about man and the contemporary science (especially in the field of evolutionary biology) made him the champion of almost every form of liberal hope in his day. And yet, as popular as he was, he influenced relatively few, if any, first rank scholars in American thought. As a man he was loved and respected; as a speaker and writer he was much in popular demand; but as a thinker he exerted little influence. One of his contemporaries, who felt the impact of his personality and counted him a close friend, attempted to state Fiske's contributions to religious thought a short quarter-century after his death. His summary reflects this suggested weakness in Fiske's thought. The author spoke of Fiske's "great contribution to evolution" (the doctrine of the prolongation of infancy), and continued:

It cannot be said that he originated for religion any single truth of like importance to this one great thought which he proudly, and yet reverently, laid on the altar of the doctrine of evolution. Yet he served the cause of faith in more ways, direct and indirect, than can ever be fully known or definitely measured. What a tower of strength it was, for instance, . . . to have a man of his acknowledged scholarship and ability and scientific equipment standing boldly forth on the side of spiritual realities. When people were perplexed and science-tossed, wondering whether it was still possible to believe in evolution and also to believe in God and the immortal life, this follower of Darwin and Herbert Spencer lifted up his voice in the cause of faith.⁵⁹

Not only was Fiske a popular figure of his day, but the great themes which were the core of his lectures and books on religion, the existence and nature of God and the destiny of man, are themes which continue to occupy the thoughts of religious thinkers. But with all of this before us, the fact is still true that the popularity of his works faded abruptly in the two or three years which followed his death, and those who remembered him spoke most of his personality and little of his philosophical contributions.⁶⁰ The force of his personality and the confidence which

⁵⁹ P. R. Frothingham, *All These* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), pp. 56-57.

⁶⁰ Even Frothingham admits that "many years ago" (that is, prior to 1927), one was able to find persons of "culture and education" who had never heard of the "author of *Cosmic Philosophy* and the *Destiny of Man*" (*ibid.*, pp. 47-48).

he inspired in others are testimonies to his own faith which had roots in his intuitive convictions in the inherent goodness and the glorious possibilities of man under the cosmic sovereignty of God. The fleeting interest which his formal thought inspired is witness to the impossibility of substantiating religious faith philosophically through an inadequate method. Our criticism of his philosophy of religion, therefore, is a criticism of his formal presentation. The difficulty of the task is increased because Fiske believed beyond what he knew and could prove. He had a dual faith, and it is not always easy to distinguish between the faith which was intuitively born and the faith in scientific and philosophical demonstration. The inadequacy of the latter failed to concern him because the former was always present; but this very lack of concern gives an appearance of unity to his thought which it does not possess and which does not hold under a closer scrutiny. This criticism can be justified by an examination of three postulates which are contained in his philosophy of religion and which are the major items of interest in his religious writings: (a) his doctrine of man as the subject of religious experience; (b) his doctrine of God as the object of the religious consciousness; and (c) his theory of evolution as the vehicle through which the two are brought into a productive relationship.

(a) Fiske was heir to the subjectivity which was a threat to Western thought from the time of Descartes. The liberal reaction to orthodoxy in religion in the nineteenth century, the tendency to discredit tradition, emphasized the importance of man as the active subject in the religious experience. Schleiermacher's "sense of dependence" and emphasis upon the sovereignty of God did not negate the suspicion that the centrality of man in the cosmos was the prime factor with which to reckon. Even the blow struck by the biological sciences in making man the derivative of lower forms could become, in the hands of a thinker like Fiske, a disguised blessing. Properly viewed, the theory could be made to re-establish man at the center of the universe more firmly than ever. The result was that religious

knowledge and religious action were necessarily oriented to man, his inherent capacities and his potential capabilities. Fiske was no exception to his age in this respect. In 1875 he spoke of religion as an "emotional tendency," a "craving for fulness of life," which was "incomparably the most noble as well as the most useful attribute of humanity."⁶¹ A necessary part of this definition was an assumption about the adequacy of man's nature to provide for this attribute. Fiske never questioned the ability of man to be productively in the presence of God. From the day when, as a youth, he broke from traditional theology, his surest convictions centered in the nobility of man and the ultimate adequacy of his aspirations. No blindness of native corruption clouded the light of knowledge or blurred the vision of God; no inadequacy was absolute enough to prevent the religious life. If there was darkness of limitation, then it was only temporary, and time and evolution cure enough. The "beast" in man was all behind him; ahead the road was open to the achievement of that of which his highest nature was an increasing intimation.

While we may sympathize with his reaction to those theories which tended to deprive man of that with which he is endowed, we still feel it to be unfortunate that his optimism did blind him to man's limitations. The glorious possibilities which he saw in man were too bright; the dark things in the spirit, the inadequacies, when he saw them, were painted in lighter tones. The result was that his philosophy failed ultimately to speak to the deepest needs of man. He brought a superficial hope, sweeping aside the reservations and skepticisms which men had with the brilliance of his confident optimism and a display of erudition which, while dazzling at the time, might be found to be, in more sober moments, unconvincing. When the promises which seemed so certain of fulfilment to him and his contem-

⁶¹ "Draper on Science and Religion," *Writings*, XVIII, 189. Cf. *Cosmic Philosophy*, *Writings*, XVI, 358-359, where Fiske spoke of "that aspiration after a yet higher fulness of life, after a 'closer walk with God,' which, whether it be expressed by the symbols of science, or by the symbols of mythology, is the indestructible essence of all religion."

poraries failed to materialize, his thought had little to offer in the way of sound guidance. His affirmations, so confidently and eloquently asserted in one age, seemed, to another generation, superficial or meaningless.

A second weakness in Fiske's theory of man as the subject of religious experience was in his definition of the religious experience itself. He defined the experience as rooted in a "sense of *dependence* upon something outside of ourselves." That "something" he specified as the "infinite and eternal God, the maker of heaven and earth, in whom we live and move, and have our being."⁶² This sense of dependence, in turn, gave rise to adjustments within man as he attempted to orient himself to this Being. The practical effects of such adjustments, however, Fiske did not make clear. He sometimes suggested that the essence of the matter was an attitude of worship, an attitude of awe and reverence appropriate to a relationship which could not be specified as knowledge.⁶³ According to his psychological analysis of man, however, the religious attributes involved in the response to Deity were really higher moral or ethical attributes. Here the Kantian influence in his background is most evident. While he insisted that "religion has a wider meaning than morality," that "Religion views the individual in his relations to the Infinite Power manifested in a universe of causally connected phenomena, as Morality views him in relation to his fellow creatures,"⁶⁴ the distinction between the two was not very rigid. The fact is, as he put it, "morality shades off into religion," and the "time-honoured association of religion with morality is not arbitrary but founded in the nature of things."⁶⁵ Indeed, religion is so domiciled in the evolutionary system of adjustments that "obedience to the so-called 'laws of nature,' which are the decrees of God, is therefore the fundamental principle of religion viewed practically."⁶⁶ Religious experience, in other words, aimed at

⁶² *The Idea of God, Writings*, XXI, 131, 138.

⁶³ *Cosmic Philosophy, Writings*, XVI, 245-246.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI, 154.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 310.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI, 292.

complete fulness of life (adjustment to man's total environment), while morality was only a step in that direction (adjustment to man's fellow creatures).

Fiske never seemed to sense that the neatness of the system of adjustment really meant a denial of the uniqueness of the religious experience. If he had settled with pantheism, and made *any* adjustment an adjustment to some manifestation of God, his degrees of adjustments would have been logically acceptable. At times he almost asserted that. On the other hand, he was not a true pantheist. God was more than man adjusted to; and Fiske suggested that in the religious experience man was in valid contact with a Being, not just many manifestations of one Being. In his system, as it stands, religion is made a higher morality ("higher" from the standpoint of evolution), and ethics becomes the doorway to the religious experience. The best evidence of this is in his locating the origin of both morality and religion in the evolutionary turning point, the prolongation of infancy. Just how "sympathy" and "altruism" lead to the "sense of dependence" is never made clear, but Fiske was certain that without the prolongation of infancy there would have been neither religion nor morality. The tendency was to strip the religious experience of its uniqueness and, as morality had a tendency to become a matter of utilitarian or pragmatic concern, religion had the tendency to become naturalistic.

Fiske's doctrine of man as the subject of religious experience was not without its values, however. Foremost among these was his conviction that adequate religious experience was a possibility for man. His inadequate anthropology and his tendency to lose the unique character of the religious experience must not lead us to ignore the belief which was implicit in all his thought. Man, as the created child of God, is not radically alienated from his Creator and the Source of his living. Fiske never finally separated his hopes for man from his religious faith. Indeed, the central purpose of much of his work was to join the two through a method which the science of his day recognized as

authoritative. His work became outmoded as the method he used was changed. But what he tried to do is still a task for every age: the attempt to show that religious faith is a part of the equipment of the whole man and that the vision of God is not eccentric to the highest knowledge of man. His emphasis upon the individual character of the religious consciousness was substantially in the Protestant tradition. His liberal fear of the dangers inherent in institutionalized authoritarianism, and his insistence that the soul's communion with God was not to be restricted by external, man-made forms or formulae, are convictions which the liberal Protestant shares. On the other hand, Fiske was not totally unaware that religious faith does have social roots and is nourished in the community. He suggested this when he found in the family organization an avenue to the attributes which were expressive of the religious consciousness. He also saw, but overemphasized, the close relationship between true religion and ethical action. He erred when he made religion evolve from morality, but he was not wrong when he saw that the highest spiritual aspirations of man are not divorced from ethical sensitivity.

(b) The second of the three central principles in Fiske's philosophy of religion is his idea of God as the object of religious devotion and faith. In his major work he affirmed that his whole cosmic philosophy rested upon the postulate of the existence of God. His criticism of orthodox theology was not in *what* it had reference to, but *how* it sought to represent the Deity, and the tendency which he felt it had to let the representations take the place of the Deity. His early antimetaphysical bias made him skeptical of assuming that any humanly conceived attributes adequately represented God. The Spencerian theory of knowledge seemed to preclude any real knowledge of the Ultimate Being. God was a necessary postulate of the theory of knowledge, but beyond that man could say little with confidence about the nature of God. Fiske's professed agnosticism here, however, was concerned with the essence of God, not his existence,

and even that was not deeply rooted. In his last works he was writing of the "Quasi-Human God" and re-establishing an avenue to metaphysical knowledge through the higher attributes of man.

This gradual change reflects the basic weakness in Fiske's idea of God. The assurance of the existence of God in the absence of some intimation of his essence may well be questioned. It is doubtful that Fiske ever actually believed that man knew only *that* God is and not *what* God is. It is certain that in his later works on religion he was willing to accept certain definitive implications of man's religious consciousness concerning God's nature as valid. His early concern to establish the postulate of the existence of God did lead him to adopt a position which suggested that we could have no knowledge about God until that knowledge was derived from the application of his newly adopted scientific method. Such application assured Fiske that God did exist as the Power manifested in phenomena. God was really a logical necessity, a necessity from the standpoint of the Spencerian psychology and philosophy. The confidence which Fiske had in this system (that is, a confidence that "adjustment" was descriptive of the process of knowing), plus his practical pantheism, gave to the logical existence of God the character of reality. His argument as to God's real existence was saved from being purely formal by the introduction of the Lockean epistemology on the evolutionary level. The inconceivability of the nonexistence of the Absolute Power was the product of race-experience, through the formation of psychical attributes in the individual. The presence in the individual mind or mental processes of the results of mankind's adjustments to the phenomenal manifestations of God bore fruit in the inability of the individual to think without postulating God's existing.

The first qualification of his limitation of knowledge of God to "existence," therefore, is seen in the necessity of conceiving of God as existing as Force or Power. But what do these terms mean? Fiske read Locke through Berkeley. Our experience is really psychical experience; what we know is our states of

consciousness. The "Force" we conceive, therefore, cannot be physical. It must be psychical; at least man's knowledge of the force must be given in psychical terms. God, as far as man is concerned, is a spiritual Power, manifested in phenomena. This provides the second qualification. The third arises out of the definition of the psychical as the term refers to man's consciousness. At the highest level this means ethical and religious. These attributes are just as much the product of evolutionary experience and adjustment as thought itself is. The same inconceivability test applies to our idea of God as the Power which makes for righteousness, that is, the Source of Moral Law to which man at his best responds. However much Fiske may have tried to derive these "essences" from increasing knowledge—and that was his intention—we cannot escape the conclusion that the idea of the "existence" of God really includes these essential descriptions of God's nature. We know that God exists, in Fiske's system, because that existence is qualified by human consciousness; that is, what we mean by the "existence of God" is really "adequate explanation for the presence of man's states of consciousness." The character of these states obviously determines the essential nature of the Ultimate Being—determines it in so far as that Being is possible to human knowledge. Fiske seemed to realize this when he altered his attitude toward "anthropomorphization." But what this really means is that what we say of God is true in relation to human intelligence. Since God is something more than human knowledge touches, anthropomorphisms cannot exhaust God's nature. But the "cosmic" part of God that is outside the area of human knowledge is a formal logical hypothesis only. On Fiske's own definition, we cannot know that it has any real existence. In the last analysis, therefore, it is the essential knowledge which gives evidence of real existence, and God is limited, for all practical purposes, by the anthropomorphisms derived from man's states of consciousness. The thing which saved Fiske from agnosticism was really his faith in human consciousness, not his reliance upon scientific

demonstration. He tried to unite the two by making the findings of science demonstrate the origin of the consciousness. But unless the method of demonstration presupposed the thing which the consciousness indicated, then it would fail in its purpose. Either the exposition of the method is simply a neat psychological exercise which is somewhat gratuitous philosophically, or else it begins in agnosticism and ends in agnosticism or atheism. Since Fiske refused to accept the latter as his position, we are forced to accept the former as descriptive of his system.

(c) We have already suggested our basic criticism of Fiske's idea of evolution as the vehicle of the religious consciousness. Since his Cosmic Philosophy was intended as an introduction to the interpretation of the cosmos according to Spencer's law of evolution, the importance of the weakness of this point needs to be stressed. The union of God and man in the religious experience was understandable to Fiske only in terms of an age-long evolutionary process which had endowed the individual with capacities for response to God. The religious consciousness, in other words, was, on the side of man's equipment, an evolved feeling of dependence upon an increased environment. To the extent that knowledge of God was not possible for lower forms of life, the capacity in man was the product of the process of evolution itself. Fiske thus made evolution the vehicle which joins the individual to the experience out of which the God-consciousness develops. Evolution, therefore, is the bearer of the form of knowledge of God and, to an extent, of the matter of that knowledge.⁶⁷ This suggests that he betrayed his primary conviction in his attempt to substantiate it. He did not accept the implications of this himself; but the legitimacy of holding to the conviction *and* the method is certainly very doubtful. His denial of authoritarianism, either in the form of an institution or of a dogma, was made in the favor of a conviction of the validity of

⁶⁷ The presence of the "matter" of knowledge in evolution is not quite so evident as the presence of the "form." However, the immanence of God becomes increasingly present to man as his adjustments expand their referents. The matter of knowledge, therefore, is at least conditioned by the stages of evolution.

man's higher consciousness. Man was able to give to himself the available knowledge of God, ethical imperatives and assurances of human destiny. But Fiske replaced the rejected authority with a new one, and employed the new authority to vindicate his rejection. The freedom of man from bondage of spirit was still implicitly denied, and the new source of bondage was evolution itself. His vision of a growing Humanity whose spirit would breathe a freer and nobler air was not derived from his method, but was held in spite of it. The bondage with which he was left was not nearly so rich in its content and implications as the one from which he departed, but to which he owed much of his inspiration.

It is not surprising that those who sought to carry his arguments to their logical conclusions ended with a naturalistic religion. Man was bound to the past, but his past held little which ennobled him. The value lay in the future. Even the significance of the creation of man by God was to be derived from that hypothetical man of the future who was the goal of evolution and of creation. The "image of God" in man, in so far as it was to be dimly seen in the present man, was to be traced finally to the prolongation of infancy, the effects of which had developed the nobler aspirations of man. But the lengthening of the period of infancy with its resultant altruistic feelings was after all only a natural process. As appealing as the suggestion might have seemed to such men as Henry Drummond,⁶⁸ it hardly seems sufficient to account for the presence of the God-consciousness in man. In a like manner, Fiske had evolution provide, not just the possibility of knowledge, but the knowledge itself. Out of the process would emerge the good life, its inspiration and fulfilment. From faith in the dependableness of the law of evolution came whatever assurances man might have concerning his destiny, social and individual.

⁶⁸ Cf. his *The Lowell Lectures on The Ascent of Man* (3rd ed.; New York, 1894).

Fiske's great—and inspiring—faith in man was rooted deeper than his attempted justification provided. Had he followed the logical implications of his system his faith would have lost something of its envisioned affinity to the Christian tradition. He did not bring himself to face that choice. As a result, his faith remained a faith—and that for him was primary. He found the scientific method valid only when it justified that faith, and he scarcely considered the contradictions. All that he wrote is a testimony to his deeply rooted idealism. From his scholarly criticisms of Buckle to his arguments through analogy for the immortality of the human soul in his last works, he believed more than he could prove. His life was dedicated to the study of the science and philosophy of his day, but none knew better than he that he sought more than his studies could provide. His real creed, in the words of Victor Hugo, he placed upon the title page of the greatest statement of his faith:

Soyez comme l'oiseau posé pour un instant
Sur des rameaux trop frêles,
Qui sent player la branche et qui
Chante pourtant,
Sachant qu'il a des ailes!⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Through Nature to God, Writings*, XXI, 211.

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articles and essays published in periodicals. Both groups are listed according to publication dates. Certain articles were published in the collections with titles different from those under which they originally appeared. Where this is true the article is listed under its original title and a note appended to the entry giving the title as it appears in the collection.

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